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THE ORIGINS AND FORM OF C. P. S. U. WORK  
AMONG WOMEN, 1919 - 1924

by



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A THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE ORIGINS AND FORM OF C. P. S. U. WORK AMONG WOMEN, 1919 - 1924 submitted by Doris S. Burghardt in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Long before the Russian Revolution, the idea of female emancipation was important in Russia. In the nineteenth century it had been one of the prime goals of the intelligentsia. Lenin shared this attitude and included female emancipation in his theory of social revolution and in the program of his party. He used the Marxist historical explanation for the downtrodden position of women in society, and formulated immediate and practical aims for Party work among women. He called for the involvement of women in the revolution, and then for their large scale participation in the economy and public life of the new Soviet Russia. In line with these aims, the Russian Communist Party in the 1920's conducted propaganda and agitation among women to encourage them to become involved in society generally and attempted to organize them to solve those particular problems that they faced as women.



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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the origins and form of an experiment in social change which took place in Soviet Russia in the 1920's: specifically the work of the Russian Communist Party on the problem of the emancipation of women. A perusal of Western sources on the Communist Party, and the available Russian sources showed no comprehensive study of the question is available here at present. And in fact, most contemporary Western sources restrict themselves to comments on laws passed shortly after the Revolution on the family and marriage, with a few references to Alexandra Kollontai and 'free love'. Earlier studies dealt mostly with specialized problems and their relation to women, such as prostitution, medical care, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

Very reassuring to the historian is the emergence of the fact that the question of the emancipation of women did not suddenly arise in fully developed form at the time of the Revolution, but had its origins in Russian culture, Russian literature, and the development of social thought and social movements in nineteenth century Russia. In fact it appears that the question of women's emancipation was already a burning issue to the Russian intelligentsia in the 1860's, particularly when women were barred from the universities. And their

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<sup>1</sup>A notable exception was work done in the 1920's by two American women: Susan M. Kingsbury and Mildred Fairchild, Factory Family and Women: In the Soviet Union (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), p.265. They concluded that "the opportunity for promotion to responsible work, both in and out of industry, seems to be extraordinarily available to women. Their advance has been included in the program of the Communist Party. Decrees have called for them in responsible places as part of the campaign for equality and for the release of hitherto suppressed ability."





preoccupation with their emancipation and other social issues led many young women into the ranks of the radicals and revolutionaries from the 1860's through the Revolution.

Obviously the contribution of Marx and Engels to the development of Lenin's thought on this subject must be considered. The influence of Marx and Engels was basic to the way in which Lenin formulated the problem of female emancipation, but a careful study of the writings of Marx and Engels yields only their historical formulation of the development of women's place in society and little by way of methods for emancipating women. Even Engels, who in contrast to Marx addressed himself directly to the problem of women's unequal position in society, claims that the position of women cannot be improved until the proletarian revolution has brought the new socialist society into existence. He predicts that then, and only then, will women's position in the family and in society improve.

It appears then, that female equality owes more to the Russian nineteenth century radical tradition than it does to Marx and Engels. Lenin believed that women should and would participate in the revolutionary uprising itself and that they can and must participate fully in the creation of the new Soviet state or else it would not come into being. By definition, to Lenin, the new Soviet society would not exist until women take an equal part in it with men, and in immediate terms, the new Soviet society could not be created without the active involvement and assistance of the Russian women. Lenin's definition of female equality was women's participation in all aspects of public life on the same level as man. He claimed too, that women would need



special consideration if they were to reach this goal because of their handicaps, as both tradition and the day to day chores conspired to keep women tied to the home. But he maintained this special consideration was woman's due and must be given her. Krupskaya, who was involved with the work of the emancipation of women as it evolved in Russia, had originally agreed with Lenin that jobs of their own and institutions to lighten their domestic work would emancipate women, but later went further to stress that women also needed better living conditions, education and culture before they could be said to be emancipated. It seems that it was Lenin and Krupskaya who formulated Party attitudes towards women, not Kollontai. And although the latter is usually regarded in the West as an important influence in Communist Party attitudes towards women, she was actually more effective in her role as a revolutionary agitator than as a theorist or organizer for Party work among women.

Even before the Revolution the practical aspects of theory and actual organization were important because Lenin hoped that women would help to make the revolution. While the tradition of the nineteenth century radicals had made the issue of female emancipation an important one to the Russian Bolsheviks, and the question had been elaborated in theory, it was recent internal developments in Russia that forced the Party to make tactical decisions and practical moves with respect to work among women. The growth of the female proletariat and its increasing alienation from the Russian Government were both intensified by the First World War, and there were signs of their growing political awareness. But despite this fact, the Bolsheviks



found it impossible to organize mass work among women before 1917 because of police repression. Only after the February Revolution when internal conditions had changed could a beginning be made. Mass work did not take shape, however, until a year later with the emergence of a plan developed by the First All-Russian Congress of Working Women and Peasants held in the fall of 1918. The organizational plan prepared by this Congress was introduced to all Party organs later that year and at the insistence of the Eighth Party Congress in 1919, all local Party Committees were made responsible for putting the plan for work among women into actual practice. Also in 1919 under the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a Women's Department was set up which was responsible for the direction and planning of mass work among women.

This study ends with a discussion of the organization, aims and methods of the Women's Department. The most useful source in this regard was a copy in the Smolensk Archives of the report of the Fourth Conference of the Chiefs of Women's Departments held in 1921. In this report past work is evaluated and future plans made. In addition it contains a detailed outline of the organization of the Departments themselves, from the guberniia down to the volost level and lists the responsibilities of each. Also useful in evaluating and tracing the direction of Party work among women were the stenographic reports of the Party Congresses. As for final results in the form of statistics, both Soviet and American sources were available and there was basic agreement between them. An additional source that proved invaluable was the Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1933 edition, which filled in many gaps in the chronology of events and contained some useful



statistics whilst cross-checking on these events and statistics proved the source reliable.

In this thesis, transliteration of Russian words follows the Library of Congress system with the soft signs omitted. Surnames are an exception and are spelled in what seems the most commonly used English form. Terms such as guberniia and uezd are not treated as foreign words since they are in common use in Russian and Soviet studies. The term Zhenotdel is italicized because it did not appear in any of the English language works consulted.







## CHAPTER I

### SOME WESTERN MISCONCEPTIONS AND THEIR ORIGINS

Bolshevik ideas on the emancipation of women are the subject of many misconceptions and myths in the West. They originated, along with a generally negative Western attitude, at the time of the Revolution when the Western press carried sensational reports on the treatment of women in the new Revolutionary state. It was widely believed that marriage had been abolished and that women were being 'communalized'. Particularly hair-raising was the New York Times' article of October 1919 entitled "Soviets Make Girls Property of State: Decrees Compel Them to Register at 'Free Love Bureau' on Attaining 18 Years."<sup>1</sup> Of course, no "Free Love Bureau" was ever established or even contemplated by the Bolshevik Party. Nonetheless stories such as these created prejudices which have discouraged scholarly studies of Party work among women up to the present.

The effect of the Revolution on the women of Russia has been seen only in the light of the laws affecting marriage and the family and, in this area, misunderstanding has been the rule rather than the exception. A case in point is Leonard Schapiro's otherwise comprehensive study of the Communist Party which never discusses Party work among women. With regard to women he mentions only the Family Codes of 1918 and 1926, which he decries as "squarely aimed at breaking up the family unit." He gives his reasons for believing as he does:

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<sup>1</sup>New York Times October 26, 1919, p. 5.



Both marriage and divorce were reduced to simply registration, no distinction was made between legitimate and illegitimate children, or after 1926 between registered and unregistered de facto marriages, the rights and duties of both partners were equalized, and no relationship was in law recognized as subsisting between the husband's kinsmen and the wife's.<sup>2</sup>

In light of the reasons he gives, a re-examination of his original statement indicates that by "family" he means the patriarchal extended family. He also seems to favor church rather than civil marriage, and unequal rather than equal rights for husband and wife. Schapiro is correct in that the Soviet state was opposed to these aspects of the family. Unfortunately, the general way in which he states his claim can easily lead the reader to assume that the State was determined to break all family ties, and for this conclusion he gives no evidence. A further shortcoming in Schapiro's discussion is that he fails to note that the recognition of de facto marriages in 1926 became law only after lengthy popular discussion,<sup>3</sup> and that acceptance of de facto marriages was not intended to encourage such unions but a recognition that many such marriages existed and was a means of giving legal protection to the women and children of these marriages. Most of the unregistered or so called de facto marriages were church marriages and this aspect of the Family Code of 1926 was a concession to the churches.<sup>4</sup> It made church marriages legally valid

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> For a transcript of some of the discussion of the draft of the 1926 Code on marriage see: Rudolf Schlesinger, ed., The Family in the U.S.S.R.: Documents and Readings (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1929), pp. 81-153.

<sup>4</sup> I.A. Kurganov, Semia v S.S.S.R. ("The Family in the U.S.S.R.") (Frankfurt/Main: Possev-Verlag, 1967), p. 101.



without the additional step of civil registration. Schapiro claims that the "simple registration" of divorce was also aimed at the breaking up of the family. But to jump to this conclusion is to overlook the way in which marital incompatibility was handled in the second half of the nineteenth century Russia. While legal divorce was practically unknown among all social groups because it was "fraught with unsurmountable [sic] difficulties and prohibitive expense," the peasants solved the problem through separations approved by the volost peasant's court. If both parties agreed to the separation the court merely registered it, if the desire to end the marriage was one-sided, then the court adjudicated.<sup>5</sup> For the peasants the simple registration of a divorce at the local court was no drastic change.

Schapiro's interpretation obscures the fact that under the new laws marriage previously complicated by religious barriers became a straightforward matter,<sup>6</sup> while divorce previously available only to the very patient and very wealthy was now available to all; the illegitimate child which until the late nineteenth century could not even be legitimized by subsequent marriage was given equal rights with legitimate children, and the wife was given equal legal rights with her husband. William Chamberlin is one western historian who does recognize that these laws and others "emphasized the full juridical equality

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<sup>5</sup>Elaine Elnett, Historic Origin and Social Development of Family Life in Russia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 94.

<sup>6</sup>Harold J. Berman, "Soviet Family Law in the Light of Russian History and Marxist Theory," Yale Law Journal, LVI (November, 1946), 27.





of men and women."<sup>7</sup> As a final reply to Schapiro's claim that these laws were designed to break up the family two points should be noted. First, the lifelong nature of the marriage contract has always been an essential component of Soviet Family Law, to the extent that lack of such intent leaves the guilty party liable to criminal prosecution.<sup>8</sup> And second, a provision of the 1918 Code made children responsible for the support of needy parents.<sup>9</sup>

Another common mistake of historians is to overemphasize the influence of Alexandra Kollontai's ideas on the emancipation of women. Even worse, she is usually misinterpreted. For example, Schapiro attributes the attempt to destroy the family to "left-wing hotheads of whom Alexandra Kollontai was typical,"<sup>10</sup> and Nettl quotes Kollontai to the effect that "the family is no longer necessary."<sup>11</sup> Nettl does not supply a footnote but perhaps he is referring to Kollontai's book, Communism and the Family, in which case the correct quote is, "The family is ceasing to be a necessity for its members as well as for the

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<sup>7</sup>William Henry Chamberlin, The Russian Revolution 1917-1921, I (New York: MacMillan Co., 1935), 361.

<sup>8</sup>Berman, p. 41. John H. Hazard, "Law and the Soviet Family," Wisconsin Law Review (March, 1939), p. 237. Hazard states: "If any shorter term is in mind, it may be cause to subject the delinquent to criminal prosecution for rape brought about by use of fraud and delusion."

<sup>9</sup>See Article 163 of the Family Code of 1918 reproduced in Schlesinger, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>Schapiro, p. 346.

<sup>11</sup>J.P. Nettl, The Soviet Achievement (London: Thames and Hudson 1967), p. 109.





State."<sup>12</sup> In this work she makes the point that the family is no longer necessary to its members for education, daily care or financial security since the proletarian family has long been unable to fill these needs. In lieu of its old role, now defunct, she ascribes to the family a new role as a "union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal persons of the Communist Society, both of them free, both of them independent, both of them workers."<sup>13</sup> By "free" she meant that neither partner was subservient to, or economically dependent on, the other. Although Kollontai lived a highly unconventional personal life, she never advocated the break-up of the family. On the contrary, in her report to the Eighth Party Congress of 1919, she expressed concern over the break-up of families:

Don't forget, comrades, that the revolution has now touched the family deeply. Families are being destroyed before our very eyes and those who suffer most of all are the women and children.<sup>14</sup>

In view of these quotations there seems no room left to accuse even left-wing Kollontai of wanting to break up the family.

The concept 'free love' is also widely used by Western scholarly authorities to characterize the period of the twenties and Kollontai herself. According to Adam Ulam, for example, Kollontai was an

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<sup>12</sup>Alexandra Kollontai, Communism and the Family (London: Workers' Socialist Federation, n.d.), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>Kommunisticheskaia Partia Sovetskogo Soiuza, Protokoly i stenograficheskie otchety sezdov i konferentsii Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza: Vosmoi Sezd RKP (b) Mart 1919 goda: Protokoly (Moscow: 1959), p. 299. Later references to volumes in this series are referred to only by the title of the particular volume.



advocate of 'free love'.<sup>15</sup> He does not tell us which of her books or pamphlets lead him to this conclusion, and he doesn't even tell us what 'free love' means. Perhaps the only way to settle the importance of the so-called 'free love' hypothesis once and for all is to examine a letter written by Lenin to Inessa Armand in 1915 in which he criticizes the pamphlets she was writing for women. In his letter, Lenin tells Inessa Armand that in his opinion a "demand for free love" should not be included in the pamphlet. For, as he says, "What do you mean by it? What can one mean by it?" he tells her in effect to spell out those freedoms that women can demand in a socialist as opposed to a capitalist society. For example, he suggests that women should demand material security from the state which will give them the freedom to choose their husbands for emotional not economic reasons. Lenin warns Armand that if she is not specific in her pamphlet she will be misinterpreted. Women will understand 'free love' to mean freedom of adultery, freedom from seriousness in love, or some such non sequitur. Lenin's criticism of the term 'free love' shows that it was just as vague and meaningless in 1915 as it is today.<sup>16</sup>

As Lenin makes clear in his letter, the Bolsheviks under his leadership did not reject marriage. They rejected 'bourgeois marriage' or marriage based on economic rather than emotional ties. Krupskaya, who also wrote on the emancipation of women, stressed even more than

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<sup>15</sup>Adam B. Ulam, The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia (Toronto: The MacMillan Co., 1965), p. 285.

<sup>16</sup>V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, XXX (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 180-1.



Lenin the emotional needs of the individual and saw in the proletarian revolution the opportunity for women to realize their full human potential as individuals. She agreed with Engels who said of capitalist society:

The possibility of purely human sentiments in our intercourse with other human beings has nowadays been sufficiently curtailed by the society in which we live, which is based on class antagonism and class rule.<sup>17</sup>

The Bolsheviks, in this period, also maintained as good Marxists that only the proletarian revolution could create that society in which people would be freed from economic exploitation and the strictures of bourgeois society which prevented the realization of the full human potential and the fulfillment of emotional needs.<sup>18</sup> Women's economic dependence on their husbands and fathers precluded freedom for women and only under Communism would this dependency end. Only when conditions permitted women to have economic independence could they achieve emancipation. Women could not achieve this goal in the home or through domestic work, but only in socially productive tasks in public life and industry.<sup>19</sup>

For all Marxists the position of women was a product of historical and economic development and freedom for women would be possible

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<sup>17</sup> Frederick Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works: In One Volume (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 613. This volume is hereafter referred to as Selected Works.

<sup>18</sup> For this aspect of humanism in Marx see: Auguste Cornu, The Origins of Marxist Thought (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1957), p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in Selected Works, p. 509.





only under socialism. Lenin too was unequivocally in favor of female emancipation and for him it was closely tied to his ideas on revolution and the building of Soviet society.<sup>20</sup> Lenin's call to women cannot be explained simply as an attempt to correct a manpower shortage. First, Russia suffered not from a shortage of labor in the post-Revolutionary years but from unemployment. Second, as more recent developments in post Second World War West Germany have shown, a shortage of manpower in itself does not lead to new ideas on the role of women or to their participation in public life.<sup>21</sup> Like the sensational interpretations of women's emancipation, this particular hard-headed explanation proves inadequate and incorrect. For practical and ideological reasons Lenin wanted to see women involved in all aspects of society including the economy and public administration. He believed that the Revolution and the new Soviet society had a better chance of success if it had the support of women as well as men. For not only was the intelligentsia a force to be reckoned with, having very set ideas on the need for female emancipation, but the female intelligentsia was known for political activism. The female peasant was a major force in the rural economy and her hostility was potentially very dangerous. In addition, the female proletariat had already shown its readiness to strike and demonstrate under the Tsar and to ignore them was unwise for any regime. But Lenin's attitude toward women's emancipation was not

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<sup>20</sup>Lenin, XXX, 271.

<sup>21</sup>Rolf Dahrendorf, Society and Democracy in Germany, Anchor Books (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), p. 72.





dictated solely by these defensive considerations, he also believed that women were capable of taking an active role in public life.

Before the Revolution, Lenin said "every cook should learn to administer the government,"<sup>22</sup> and though this was often repeated by Western observers the import of the remark was lost on them. In Russian, kukharka is feminine, as were most of the cooks, and Lenin meant that women as well as men must learn about government and participate in governing. The idea of such complete emancipation for women was so unheard of in the West that no one at the time, it seems, noticed that Lenin was referring to women. Schapiro, who did notice, assumes Lenin's meaning to be that governing takes no ability at all. Specifically, Schapiro refers to:

. . . the illusion which Lenin fostered that administration was a trifle which could be safely entrusted to 'any housewife' . . . provided she were a proletarian.<sup>23</sup>

Schapiro has misunderstood Lenin. As Lenin himself explained in 1917, just before the October Revolution, he was no "utopian." He did not believe that untrained persons could administer government, he believed that common people could learn to run the government. Wealth or a background of wealth was not necessary as it had been in the past.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he did not mean that government was so inconsequential that even women could handle the job, he meant that women were just as

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<sup>22</sup>Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1932, XXV, p. 239. This is the only place the quote is cited although it is referred to elsewhere by Lenin. See Lenin, XXVI, 113.

<sup>23</sup>Schapiro, p. 242.

<sup>24</sup>Lenin, XXVI, 113.



capable of governing as men. He told the working women of Moscow in 1919:

In order to be active in politics under the old capitalist regime special training was required, so that women played an insignificant part in politics, even in the most advanced and free capitalist countries. Our task is to make politics available to every working woman.<sup>25</sup>

Lenin did not think that government was inconsequential, rather he believed that women's participation in it was of great importance.

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<sup>25</sup>Lenin, XXX, 44.



## CHAPTER II

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIAN TRADITION

Female emancipation was a vital issue in Russia even before the Revolution. There were factors in the Russian cultural milieu which produced, in addition to ardent advocates of female equality, a generally favourable climate of opinion owing much to the traditional culture shared by the peasants and those of peasant background. Their attitudes were important since they made up the majority of the population and these same attitudes affected the proletariat which retained cultural ties with its peasant background. Workers were sometimes referred to as peasant-proletarians.<sup>1</sup> Also important is the formation of opinion of the radical intelligentsia who were very much concerned with the question of female emancipation. And the female intelligentsia itself through political acts drew public attention to women as the political and social equals of men.

The first factor, peasant culture, was oral and strongly influenced by the byliny or epic ballads. In these tales the heroic exploits of both men and women were sung, and women were portrayed as strong individuals with the physical strength to defeat male heroes in combat. And also of interest, there is some evidence from Kovalevsky that very early Russian society was matriarchal; this would mean that

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<sup>1</sup>Lyaschenko disputes this view and calls them "hereditary proletarians." See Peter I. Lyaschenko, History of the National Economy of Russia to the 1917 Revolution, Russian translation project of the American Council of Learned Societies (New York: MacMillan Company, 1949), pp. 544-5.



women had both status and decision making power.<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century, Cossack women fought beside their men in battle and were included in the heavy drinking and roisterous behavior of community festivities.<sup>3</sup> In 1918 women led the Cossack revolt in Chuguyev. In the Sebastopol revolt of 1830, three hundred and seventy five women were sentenced to death.<sup>4</sup> In general, Cossack women were known for their hardiness and independence of spirit in nineteenth century Russia.

Also, unlike the women of Western European culture, Russian women had been touched little by the concepts of Chivalry and Romantic love. While in the West, Romantic love stressed the separation of the sexes and surrounded women with a mystique, the Russian tradition emphasized companionship and close association between men and women.<sup>5</sup> In general, Western ideas had reached only educated Russians and this particular idea seems to have had little effect even on them. The Romantic ideal of woman as a frail defenseless creature would never have been accepted by the peasants in any case since it was totally incompatible with their personal knowledge of flesh and blood peasant women who did heavy farm work alongside with men. There was also little

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<sup>2</sup>Maxime Kovalevsky, Modern Customs and Ancient Laws of Russia, Ilchester Lectures for 1889-90 (London: David Nutt, 1891), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Longworth, The Cossacks (London: Constable, 1969), pp. 42-3.

<sup>4</sup>For these and other examples see Elnett, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>Maurice Hindus, Humanity Uprooted, (2nd ed., New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930), p. 137. Hindus is a particularly competent observer: a Russian born American, he returned to Russia and his native village several times in the twenties and thirties.





personal privacy in peasant housing conditions. Western style modesty and delicacy would have been an extreme handicap in peasant family dwellings where entire families lived and slept in one room.<sup>6</sup> Under such conditions how could any aura of female mystery be preserved?

As for the educated classes who represent the other factor in the development of a climate of opinion in Russia favoring the emancipation of women, any Western Romantic and Chivalric influence was more than compensated for by the Russian literary tradition of the nineteenth century which usually portrayed women as strong characters. As the literary critic Dobrolyubov pointed out in several of his reviews, Russian literature since Pushkin showed a recurring pattern of the strong heroine.<sup>7</sup> In his article, "What is Oblomovshchina?", he found great similarities in Eugene Onegin, Pechorin from a Hero of Our Times, and Goncharov's character Oblomov. These heroes are all ineffectual in coping with life. The strong characters in each of these novels is a woman. As Dobrolyubov points out, "Everyone [sic] of the Oblomovs met a woman superior to himself."<sup>8</sup> Dobrolyubov believed that women were more capable of independent thought for two reasons. First because

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<sup>6</sup>Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, L'Empire Des Tsars et Les Russes, Vol. I: Le Pays et les Habitants (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1881), p. 488. This is a first hand account. See also Mary Matossian, "The Peasant Way of Life," in The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia, ed. by Wayne S. Vucinich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>For an elaboration of this idea see Vera Sandomirsky Dunham, "The Strong-Woman Motif," in The Transformation of Russian Society: Aspects of Social Change Since 1861, ed. by Cyril E. Black (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 459-83.

<sup>8</sup>N.A. Dobrolyubov, Selected Philosophical Essays, trans. by J. Fineberg (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 201.



they were more receptive and imaginative than men, and second because be they peasant or nobility, they were left more to their own thoughts. In general, females were not forced to conform to traditional patterns of thought as early in life or to the same extent as were males. Dobrolyubov noted in literature "the choice of a female personage to depict the ardent free strivings of thought and will of the peasant's estate."<sup>9</sup> One can find similar examples of the strong heroine in Tolstoy, Chekov and Gorky.<sup>10</sup> In poetry Nekrasov stressed the capacity of women to suffer and endure suffering. His poem "Mat" or "Mother" is a good example; in it he calls the suffering woman "muchenitsa-mat," which means "martyr-mother." We might also note that Russia itself, characterized as long-suffering but capable of great heroism, was always referred to as Mother-Russia, not a grande dame, but a peasant mother.

Many of the female peasants were indeed long-suffering martyrs. The general oppression which lay upon the entire peasantry was felt most keenly by the women who had to share the backbreaking labor of the men and perform their own household chores besides. In pre-emancipation times they rebelled against the landlords along with the men and many women were among the peasants deported to Siberia for unruly behavior.<sup>11</sup> In the later part of the nineteenth century, peasant women coming to the cities to find work were handicapped by

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<sup>9</sup>Dobrolyubov, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup>In Tolstoy's case it is interesting to note that in his novels he portrayed strong heroines despite his professed view that women had only one role in life and that was childbearing.

<sup>11</sup>Elnett, p. 82. Under Nicholas I, one third of the 7,000 serfs exiled to Siberia were women.



illiteracy. The census of 1897 showed that 13.7 per cent of Russian women could read and write, but in the country areas the literacy rate among women was only 9.6 per cent.<sup>12</sup> Many peasant women unable to find work turned to prostitution. By the early 1900's prostitution was recognized as a social problem in Russia. Most women peasants were household servants and therefore had little economic or personal independence. The census of 1897 showed that 55 per cent of the total female population were employed as domestic servants.<sup>13</sup> If on the other hand, the female peasant became a proletarian she found that she was paid only one-half to one-third of a man's wages and of course she still had to fill her double role of worker and housewife.<sup>14</sup> She was, however, looked upon by the men as a co-worker. This was, perhaps, a carryover from peasant culture. As an English observer in Petrograd in the early twentieth century pointed out:

In the industrial communities the men, too [sic] slide into the point of view that regards a woman first as a co-worker.<sup>15</sup>

Riazanova in her book Zhenskii trud, or Female Labor, contrasts

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<sup>12</sup>Central Statistical Board of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers, Women and Children in the U.S.S.R.: Brief Statistical Returns (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 51.

<sup>13</sup>Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism: Manual (2nd Rev. ed. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 603.

<sup>14</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 224.

<sup>15</sup>C.E. Fanning, Selected Articles on Russia: History Description and Politics, Handbook series (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1918), p. 154.





the organization of unions in Russia with those in the West.<sup>16</sup> She points out that in Britain, for example, the women were usually unable to become members of unions because trade unions predominated. Women belonged to the least qualified part of the proletariat and only the qualified workers showed the ability to organize.<sup>17</sup> In Russia, fortunately for the female proletariat, industrial rather than trade unions were the rule, and this may in fact have been a Government decision. Research into the policy of the Zubatov unions<sup>18</sup> would be necessary to check this out, but it does seem reasonable that the Government would have been in favor of diluting as much as possible the influence of the better qualified, more radical workers. The growth in Russia of industrial rather than professional unions brought women into the union organization and there they found support for their cause.

In 1907 the Union of Textile Workers spoke as a unit when it established the principle of sex equality,<sup>19</sup> but this development cannot be wholly attributed to male egalitarianism since approximately 60 per cent of the textile workers were women. Fairchild and Kingsbury

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<sup>16</sup>A. Riazanova, Zhenskii trud (Moscow: Moskovskii Rabochii, 1923), p. 252. For evidence Riazanova cites Erstes Jahrbuch des Internationalen Gewerkschaftsbundes, Anhang VII, Amsterdam: 1921.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>18</sup>In an attempt to forestall the influence of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Social Democrats among the proletariat and in an attempt to quell labor unrest, the Russian Government organized labor unions which they hoped to control by a network of police spies and organizers. Their most spectacular failure in this regard was the workers' demonstration in 1905, known as Bloody Sunday, which was led by a priest in the Government's employ -- Father Gapon. See Ulam, pp. 182-3.

<sup>19</sup>Kingsbury and Fairchild, p. 79.





claim that generally the unions maintained a policy of sex equality,<sup>20</sup> and there is considerable indirect evidence to support this claim. Looking ahead to the 1920's there is the fact that trade union policy supported not only equality of pay and opportunity for women but advocated the setting up of creches, maternity homes and other institutions to give special help to working women.<sup>21</sup> And during the unemployment crisis of 1921 they also laid down the policy that self supporting women with children under one year of age were to be given job preference.<sup>22</sup> These resolutions were not due to Communist Party policy alone. As Fairchild and Kingsbury point out, the resolutions of the Third All-Russian Conference at any rate were the same demands which had been put forth by the textile workers in pre-Soviet times.<sup>23</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that union policy, in its acceptance of female workers and consideration for their needs in Soviet times, was as much a result of the experience and attitude of the pre-Soviet trade unions as it was conscious Communist Party policy. The Russian female proletarian had earned her place of equality beside the male during the struggles with the factory owners and the police in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1914 the importance of

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>21</sup>Riazanova cites the Third All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions in 1920, on page 283.

<sup>22</sup>Riazanova, pp. 401-82. A resolution to the same effect was distributed late in 1921 to the guberniia Women's Departments. See Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza, Smolenskii Oblastnoi Partinói arkhiv ("The Smolensk Archives"), 1957, File WKP 428, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup>Kingsbury and Fairchild, p. 84.



the female proletariat as a political force was recognized by the bureaucracy. In an American magazine at the time an anonymous Russian bureaucrat was quoted as saying of the female proletariat:

It [the proletariat] organizes for revolt, furnishes the terrorists, and seeks to become intelligent. And the women you mention are in the forefront.<sup>24</sup>

Educated women were also dissatisfied because they were subject to political, legal and professional disabilities. The administrative reforms of 1864 which created the zemstvos gave the vote only to men, and women who had the right to vote by reason of owning property, had to designate some male to exercise that vote. Women could not run for elective office and were restricted in financial and business dealings since they could not sign promissory notes. Freedom of movement was denied women; only at the end of the nineteenth century could unmarried adult females obtain residence permits without parental authority, and married women could not get travel or residence permits without the husband's approval.<sup>25</sup> The married woman was bound bodily to her husband for she had to either follow him when he chose to move, or be forcibly transported to her husband at his request. Marriage law denied the woman any identity as an individual independent of her husband's will. The Svod Zakonov, a compilation of all previous laws made by Speransky under Nicholas I, gave the husband "unlimited power" over his wife and commanded her to render "unlimited obedience."<sup>26</sup> It was the co-existence of women's very unequal position in law with the

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<sup>24</sup>Fanning, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 223.

<sup>26</sup>Berman, p. 29.



heated discussion of female emancipation on the part of Russian intellectuals that spurred on the female intelligent in her fight for emancipation.

The movement for women's emancipation began in the 1860's when peasant emancipation and political and legal reforms were being discussed. In Russia, as in the West, the impetus for the movement came from the educated women and they voiced their view in the feminist journal, Rassvet or The Dawn, established in 1859. The feminists asked for a "position of equality with men, freedom from the yoke of family, economic independence, opportunity to live by their own labor."<sup>27</sup> They wanted access to the universities and to the professions first because education was valued in and for itself, and second because in some cases the women were in financial need. It must be recalled in this connection that the growing impoverishment of the petty nobility was a feature of the post-emancipation period. Beset as they were by legal restrictions, the 'fictitious marriage' became the means to freedom. In order to gain freedom from their families young women contracted marriages with understanding young men who would then give the necessary consent for residence permits or travel permits and allow the young women to pursue an independent life. As Elnett points out:

At the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies the fictitious marriage became almost a common practice among the Russian intellectuals. It was most often resorted to by girls who were anxious to obtain a passport to go abroad to study at Zurich, Paris, or Heidelberg.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Bolshaia, XXV,

<sup>28</sup>Elnett, p. 83.





The Russian Government did little to ameliorate the situation of these women dissatisfied with their lot in life. In fact developments were such as to intensify the women's anger. When the restrictions imposed on the universities by Nicholas I were rescinded the universities interpreted the new freedom to include the right for women and the general public to attend university courses, and women did attend. But student unrest began in 1858 and the radical attitudes of women students influenced the Ministry of Education to decide in 1861 that women would not be allowed into institutions of higher education.<sup>29</sup> The University Statute of 1863 which returned considerably autonomy to the universities in the hope of quelling student unrest, at the same time officially forbade the attendance of women at the universities.<sup>30</sup> The female students' chagrin can hardly be imagined at having the doors of the universities, so recently opened to them, slammed shut again.

Another blow came in 1873 when students studying abroad were ordered to return home. This new development was particularly frustrating to women since universities abroad were the only avenue of study open to them. Finally in 1878, a concession was made to their demands and special courses were opened in St. Petersburg for female students. These, the Bestuzhev Courses named after Bestuzhev-Riumin, the first director of the programme, led to degrees in the Sciences and

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick L. Alston, Education and the State in Tsarist Times (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 92. Alston also points out that the Minister of War, Dmitri Miliutin, invited women to attend the Army's medical schools when the universities were closed to them. He does not elaborate on the response to the proposal.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Hans, History of Russian Educational Policy (1701-1917) (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1964), pp. 108-9.





Arts. But contrary to the obvious preference of Russian women for the study of Medicine, the Medical Faculty was not opened until 1897 and at that not nearly enough places were provided for the female applicants.<sup>31</sup> In any case, University education did not solve the discontent of the female intelligent for she still faced the problem of finding employment and a means of putting her knowledge to practical use. As yet these women had not found a useful role in Russian society; some became disenchanted along the way and turned to revolution.

Russian literature was also a very important factor in the radicalization of women because it was revolutionary and inspired whole generations of revolutionaries to action. Throughout the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century, literature was the only means available for the presentation and discussion of revolutionary ideas, including the idea of equality for women. In literature the intelligentsia saw itself portrayed and then tried out the new ideas and solutions to social problems as they were presented in literature. Hindus emphasizes the importance of the attitude of the male intelligentsia in this respect:

Men, intellectual, literary, in other words the Russian intelligentsia, took up the cudgels on their [women's] behalf, in fact sought with energy and fervour to spur them into an ever-growing urge to rise above their accepted position in the world to strive for rehabilitation of their flesh as well as their spirit.<sup>32</sup>

The female intelligent did not have to fight against her peers for recognition; the intelligentsia, male and female, fought side by side

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<sup>31</sup>Elnett, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup>Hindus, p. 285.



for female emancipation.

The question of the emancipation of women was first taken up in Russian literature by the Russian socialist Alexander Herzen in the 1840's. Herzen's strong feelings on the subject of the position of women found expression in his diary. In 1843 he wrote:

In the future there will be no marriage, the wife will be freed from slavery; and what sort of word is wife anyway? Woman is so humiliated that, like an animal, she is called by the name of her master. Free relations between the sexes, the public education of children and the organization of property; morality, conscience, public opinion, and not the police--all this will define the details of family relationships.<sup>33</sup>

In Russia, as in the rest of Europe, emancipation was a key issue to socialists and liberals alike, and the Russian intelligentsia read with great interest the works of the French author and feminist George Sand. Herzen subscribed to Sand's "cult of the full life through passion" and added a new idea that was specifically Russian.<sup>34</sup> He stated that private passion was not enough to sustain a woman, and that like a man she needed interests outside the home. In addition to love and marriage, woman had a need to be involved in the social issues of the day. His novel Kto Vinovat?, "Who is to Blame?", published in 1847, portrays a marriage that becomes an empty shell because the heroine denies herself outside interests in order to remain with a husband who does not share them. Herzen did not believe that this personal sacrifice was the solution to the problem, but he found it expedient to conclude his novel

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<sup>33</sup>Martin Malia, Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, Universal Library (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), p. 268. Malia quotes from Herzen's Dnevnik, 30 June, 1843. Lemke, III, p. 119.

<sup>34</sup>Malia, p. 268.



with an ending acceptable to the censors of Nicholas II.<sup>35</sup> Herzen's approach to female emancipation added a new dimension to the thinking of the intelligentsia and, in this regard, Martin Malia describes his role as "seminal."<sup>36</sup>

The problem posed by Herzen in Kto Vinovat? was taken up by Nicholas Chernyshevsky and he offered a different solution in his novel What is to be Done? published under the more liberal censorship of the sixties. In this work Chernyshevsky makes two statements concerning women and marriage. First, his heroine escapes from her parents' marriage schemes by plotting her own marriage, a phenomenon which he observed in some sections of society at the time, and one of which his novel approves. Second, he follows the course of this marriage of escape, and eventually damns it through his protagonists who accept that a marriage of two people who are not completely compatible in their broader social concerns must be ended. Chernyshevsky's heroine not only solves her dilemma differently than Herzen's, she lives a different life within her marriage. Actively involved in social problems, she forms a cooperative for needy seamstresses. This picture of the active woman, first suggested by Herzen, and then more clearly delineated by Chernyshevsky, became the model of the ideal woman for the radical intelligentsia throughout the century and into the Communist period. As Malia points out, the concern of the Russian intelli-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 266.





gentsia with women's emancipation, since Herzen, not only gained a substance different from the West, but maintained the intensity of the 1840's throughout the rest of the century.<sup>37</sup>

Peter Lavrov also wrote about women and was actively involved in female emancipation. In the 1860's, like Herzen's fictional heroine, he helped to establish a co-operative for impoverished seamstresses in St. Petersburg. He also gave unofficial lectures to women students and was accused by a rival professor, probably with some justification, of "transforming young women and girls into Nihilists."<sup>38</sup> Lavrov's theory on emancipation was that women must be raised to a position of complete equality with men before truly satisfying relationships could exist between the sexes:

So long as a woman was inferior to the man both by cultural custom and in level of intellectual development, lovers' moral ideals differed and consequently the idealization of their mutual attraction bore no trace of equality. A woman sought in a man the moral ideal of strength, intelligence . . . . A man sought in women merely an aesthetic ideal of beauty and grace. . . . The true idealization of mutual love becomes possible only when a woman commands respect in the name of that same ideal of moral dignity that has been established for men. Then a union of love represents the reciprocal free choice of two beings who are mutually attracted physiologically, and who join together because each respects the human dignity of the other in all its manifestations.<sup>39</sup>

It was with the publication of Lavrov's Historical Letters, in 1868, that the idea of education for women took on a new significance. In

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Peter Lavrov, Historical Letters, trans. with an Introduction by James P. Scanlan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 34.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 207.





this work he enunciated his theory of a 'debt to the people.' He said that the education and creative activity of the few was dependent on the suffering of the many, and that this suffering had been too great. A debt was owed to the people because they had reaped too little reward for their suffering.

Mankind has paid dearly so that a few thinkers sitting in their studies could discuss its progress. . . . Perhaps what ought to be horrifying, however, is not that the progress of the minority has been costly, but that it has been so costly and that for this price so little has been achieved. If the minority had troubled itself sooner and more diligently with disseminating the development achieved in the sphere of culture and thought, the quantity of wasted lives and labor would not be so great; the debt incurred by each of us would be smaller, and would not increase so enormously with each generation.<sup>40</sup>

By the 1870's this moving statement produced a profound effect on the frustrated intelligentsia.

Until the publication of Lavrov's ideas, the radical intelligentsia had been largely Nihilists. They were mainly students who experienced a profound frustration with their contemporary society and its institutions.<sup>41</sup> They were called Nihilists because they rejected in principle: the Church, the government, conventional marriage, and traditional morality. They rejected everything that they did not find useful to society and predicted that society would improve through a

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>41</sup>F.C. Barghoorn, "D.I. Pisarev: A Representative of Russian Nihilism," Review of Politics, X (April, 1948), 190, 192. Also J.A. Rogers, "Darwinism, Scientism and Nihilism," Russian Review XIX No. 1 (1960), 10. Barghoorn in another article suggests that the reactionary policies of Nicholas I indirectly affected the intellectual, social and political history of Russia through the strong counter-reaction which they provoked. See F.C. Barghoorn, "The Russian Radicals and the Western European Revolutions of 1848," Review of Politics, XI (July, 1949), 338-9.



struggle in which only the fittest ideas and institutions would survive. They placed their faith in science and the development of the individual. Pisarev characterized himself and his followers:

In a word, here is the ultimatum of our camp: what can be smashed must be smashed; whatever is able to withstand, let it stand; what flies into pieces is rubbish; in any case hit right and hit left, from that no evil can come.<sup>42</sup>

With the arrival of Lavrov on the scene, the somewhat passive idea of individual development and the destructive approach to social change was replaced by Lavrov's positive message. He called upon the students to repay the debt they owed the masses of Russia. The students decided to go 'to the people,' to serve them and to teach them. The young women students ordered home from European universities in 1873 joined in the movement 'to the people.' The famous revolutionary, Vera Figner, went into the countryside to work as a doctor. Her own experience with police surveillance brought her to the conclusion that the policy of the Government prevented the movement from being of any benefit to the common people.<sup>43</sup> Many other young people were greeted with hostility from the peasants who could not understand these young idealists from the universities masquerading as peasants. Many students were turned over to the police by the very peasants they

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<sup>42</sup>Dmitri Pisarev, Sochineniia, i (St. Petersburg: 1897), 375, quoted in Rogers, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup>Vera Figner, Memoirs of a Revolutionist (n.p.: Martin Lawrence, 1929). Vera Figner is an interesting example of the female radical intelligent turned revolutionary. She read feminist literature, felt an obligation to the common people, and decided to become a doctor. As her family would not permit her to go abroad, she contracted a 'fictitious' marriage and studied medicine in Zurich until she felt that participation in the 'to the people' movement was more important than the completion of her medical training and she returned to Russia. Note especially pp. 163-9 in which she relates her life story to the court.



wanted so fervently to help. This movement to the people ended in 1877 with mass trials; the 'Trial of the 193' and the 'Trial of the 50.' Large numbers of women were sent to prison and exile and the magnitude of female involvement in revolutionary activity became public knowledge.

The failure of the 'to the people' movement resulted in an increase in terrorist and revolutionary activity. The opening of the Bestuzhev courses in 1878 in St. Petersburg gave the women the university education they wanted, but they still did not have the opportunity to use their new knowledge to help the people. One of the most famous of the Bestuzhev graduates was Nadezhda Krupskaya, the future wife of Lenin.<sup>44</sup> She and many other young women filled the ranks of the revolutionaries. As early as 1874 Count Palen had advised Alexander II that the success of the revolutionaries was due to the presence of young women and girls in their ranks.<sup>45</sup> Kravchinskii claims that the women's movement which had begun with their demanding equal rights in the 1860's ended with their joining the ranks of the terrorists from 1878 on.<sup>46</sup> Kravchinskii's statement is a bit far reaching and perhaps we should add that from the 1890's on they also

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<sup>44</sup>A recent Soviet book, probably brought out for the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution, is dedicated to the graduates of the Bestuzhev courses, the Bestuzhevki, with an introduction by the famous woman Bolshevik, E.D. Stasova. Bestuzhevki v riadakh stroitelei sotsializma (Bestuzhevki in the Ranks of the Builders of Socialism") (Moscow: Izdat. "Mysl", 1969).

<sup>45</sup>Elnett, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup>S.M. Kravchinskii, [Stepniak-Kravchinskii], Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life (2nd ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), p. 8.





"filled the ranks of the S-R's and other radical-democratic parties."<sup>47</sup>

In addition incidents of political protest by women caught the imagination of the Russian public. Political protest by women was a phenomenon which could be dated back to the early nineteenth century. Maria Volkonskaya, the wife of an exiled Decembrist revolutionary who followed her husband into his Siberian exile, became a legend celebrated in the poetry of Nekrasov. Sophia Perovskaya, a female terrorist, was instrumental in the assassination of Alexander II. It was her quick and cool headed change in strategy that resulted in the Emperor's death. Despite this, public reaction to her hanging was so hostile that the government decided never again to hang a woman.<sup>48</sup> Vera Figner, who had turned from humanitarian to terrorist activity, evaded arrest many times until she was betrayed to the police by an erstwhile comrade. She spent many years in the Schlüsselburg fortress. Krupskaya was also arrested and exiled, along with Lenin and other members of their circle, for conducting revolutionary propaganda among workers in St. Petersburg. One of the most famous public heroines was Vera Zasulich, who gained public approval in the 1890's when she shot Trepov, the police governor of Moscow. When Zasulich was brought to trial the jury acquitted her despite incontrovertible evidence of her guilt. Knowing she was guilty, police officials tried to take her back into custody as she left the court, but the cheering crowd would not allow it and assisted her in escaping.

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<sup>47</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 227.

<sup>48</sup>Figner, p. 175.





The same unhealthy social and political conditions which drove some women to take part in acts of political terrorism, benefited the cause of women's emancipation. Kravchinskii pointed this out:

The great service of Nihilism was on the question of woman. They recognized her as having equal rights with men.<sup>49</sup>

The alienation of the intelligentsia, male and female, in its acuteness and completeness was a particularly Russian phenomenon, and helps to explain their acceptance of radical ideas on the role of women. The intellectuals lived in what we might now call a subculture which could nourish radical ideas because it existed apart and in opposition to the existing society outside. As Nettl points out:

There were few intellectuals in Russia who had not at one time or another been on the fringe of subversion, had trouble with the police censorship, or at least been friendly with some of those who were directly involved.<sup>50</sup>

Russian intellectuals banded together against the established order. In Russia as no where in the Western world, women were treated as comrades and equals in propaganda work, conspiratorial activity, and even terrorist acts. The intelligentsia was a defined group which could reject the traditional ideas on the role of women and practice female equality in their own ranks since they had already on principle rejected the norms and morals of the society outside.

The subculture of the radical intelligentsia in nineteenth century Russia nourished the idea of complete equality for women. Lenin and Krupskaya were heirs of this tradition and so could speak

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<sup>49</sup>Kravchinskii, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup>Nettl, p. 20.



for an already existing climate of opinion among the revolutionary intelligentsia when they stressed the need for and the significance of female emancipation.



## CHAPTER III

### MARXISM-LENINISM ON THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

The position of woman depends entirely on the prevailing social system. . . [as] is clearly set forth in the doctrine of Marx and Engels, and this point has always been defended by our Party. Ever since it was founded, the Bolshevik Party has fought for equal rights for women.<sup>1</sup>

Krupskaya

Lenin's belief in female equality was evident early in his political career. In 1899 when the party programme of the Emancipation of Labor Group<sup>2</sup> was still in the draft stage, it was Lenin who suggested the Party's demands include "complete equality of rights for men and women."<sup>3</sup> In this respect Lenin was ahead of his fellow Marxists since the Russian Social Democratic Party did not adopt the idea until the Second Congress in 1903. Also as early as 1899 Krupskaya's pamphlet "Zhenshchina-rabotnitsa" or "Woman Worker," was published in the Social Democratic newspaper Iskra then under Lenin's direction. The article was his idea, although we can safely assume that Krupskaya did not require extensive persuasion since from this time on she evidenced a keen and long lasting interest in the problem of female equality.

The platform of legal equality for women which the Russian Social

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<sup>1</sup>N.K. Krupskaya, Soviet Woman: A Citizen With Equal Rights: A Collection of Articles and Speeches (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R., 1937), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>The Emancipation of Labor Group was the first Russian Marxist Party and the nucleus of the future Russian Social Democratic Labor Party.

<sup>3</sup>Lenin, IV, 239.



Democrats accepted does not in itself make then unique, since by the time of the February Revolution the liberal wing of the Constitutional Democrats or Liberal-Cadets, and the Socialist Revolutionaries had also included such a plank in their political platforms.<sup>4</sup> What was unique about the Social Democrats was their Marxist explanation for the unequal position of women.

In The Holy Family, in 1845, Marx and Engels had described the historical significance of female emancipation with a quote from Fourier:

'The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by the progress of women towards freedom, because in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation.'<sup>5</sup>

This quote suggested that the position of women has improved as society has changed over time, but in fact Marx and Engels agreed with Fourier that the "humiliation" of women merely takes on a more "hypocritical" form as society advances, in fact an "essential feature" of bourgeois society is the "humiliation" of women. They meant that in the bourgeois stage of social development woman had succeeded in escaping the more brutal forms of oppression, but she remained nonetheless oppressed. Marx himself referred to the historical significance of female emancipation in a letter to Dr. Kugelmann in 1868:

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice Hindus, p. 287.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 259.





Social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex (the ugly ones included).<sup>6</sup>

The parenthetical remark indicates that perhaps Marx, like Lavrov, was aware that equality for women was not possible in a society where women were valued only for "beauty and grace." But nonetheless he did not make any clearer statement on female emancipation, what it meant, or how it was to be achieved.

In Anti-Dühring, written in 1878, Engels agreed that "in any given society the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation." He, like Marx, is critical of the bourgeois form of the relation between the sexes and the position of women in bourgeois society.<sup>7</sup> Engels believed that women were not free or equal because, in the family they were dominated by their husbands, and in society they were subject to the social strictures that were not applied to men.

A large part of Marx and Engels' writings about women reflect a concern for the hard conditions of life for the female proletariat and a condemnation of the social evils brought on by the employment of women in factories. Engels stated that the bad working conditions undermined the health of the unborn generation. Marx agreed with a British report on children's employment published in 1866 that young girls become "foul-mouthed boys before they learn that they are women,"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Karl Marx, Letters to Dr. Kugelmann (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society for Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R., 1934), p. 83.

<sup>7</sup>Frederick Engels, Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (3 ed., Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 355.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. by Frederick Engels, The Modern Library (New York: Random House, Inc., 1906), p. 508.



and in his Critique of the Gotha Programme he pointed out that some branches of industry were physically unhealthy, and morally objectionable for women.<sup>9</sup> Engels saw that female employment disrupted traditional family life. In his book, The Condition of the Working Class in England, he described the unhappy situation that resulted when women worked and the traditional breadwinners were unemployed. Engels' reaction was that, "this situation degrades humanity in general."<sup>10</sup>

These same observations led Engels to an economic explanation for the traditionally subservient role of the female. He believed that the dominant position of the male was based on his earning power, as was graphically illustrated when the male was unemployed and his wife worked:

When the man must stay home the entire family relation is turned upside down. The basis for the sex relation, i.e. the dominant male is destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

Since, when the female became the breadwinner the roles were reversed, Engels concluded that the unequal position of woman in the family was based on her economic dependency.

In his later work, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, written in 1884, Engels turned to a more historical and sociological explanation of the form of sex relations seen in bourgeois

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<sup>9</sup>Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, in Selected Works, p. 334.

<sup>10</sup>Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England: In 1844, trans. by Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1892), p. 146.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



society. In this work he acknowledged the work of the German economist, Haxthausen, and the American ethnologist, Morgan, and their studies of the historical development of the position of women in the family and society. On the basis of their studies, Engels discussed more fully the inequalities suffered by women in marriage and he painted a very unflattering picture of bourgeois marriage and society:

The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman.<sup>12</sup>

According to Engels, this situation had not always existed. In the distant past women held considerable power because parentage and inheritance were determined through the mother. Unfortunately for women, at some unrecorded time in history, with the accumulation of property, presumably by males, the male became increasingly concerned with passing on his possessions to his own children. The institution of monogamous marriage arose at this time with its single aim "the begetting of children of undisputed paternity."<sup>13</sup> For women this turn of history was a most unfortunate event:

The overthrow of mother right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. This lowered position of women. . . has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in part, clothed in a milder form, but by no means abolished.<sup>14</sup>

In Engels' opinion this dreadful state of affairs, which he described in such lurid details, persists wherever woman's economic dependence

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<sup>12</sup>Engels, Origin of the Family, in Selected Works, p. 510.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 500.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 496.





persists.

Only the proletarian woman with her own income is freed from subjection in the family.<sup>15</sup> Are women then to achieve their emancipation by becoming proletarians? Engels gave his answer for bourgeois society as he knew it -- an uncategorical 'no'. In his letter to Gertrude Guillaume-Schak in 1885, he stated very clearly that he did not believe female emancipation could precede socialist society. He could not favor female employment in the factories because he was "more interested in the health of future generations than in the absolute formal equality of the sexes during the last years of the capitalist mode of production."<sup>16</sup> Thus, in Engels view, female emancipation could not precede socialist society. Neither employment for women, nor equal pay for equal work, which Engels claimed was the demand of all socialists, could solve the problems facing women.<sup>17</sup> Under the conditions of bourgeois society, the price for female independence was too high in human terms. Engels believed that women could gain economic independence through the factory, but factory work undermined the health of working women, and the children born of working women. The children at home suffered neglect. Although the unequal position of women was a most unhappy fact, Engels was not prepared to sacrifice babes and children to set it right. He predicted that the chance would come for women when socialist society, with a new social and economic

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 509-510, 579.

<sup>16</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Correspondence (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), p. 462.

<sup>17</sup>Engels, Origin of the Family, p. 509.



order, stepped in to acknowledge its responsibility for the welfare of children and to organize the care of children:

With the passage of the means of production into common property, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Engels believed that only then would women have a truly equal opportunity to work alongside men and only then women's financial dependency, the basis for her servile role in marriage, would be gone. The destruction of the economic basis for the unequal position of women in marriage would usher in a new era in human relationships and a new life for women.

Marx and Engels focused their concern on women at work in the factories and on women's role in the family. Engels stated that the generally inferior position of women in law was a reflection of her inferior position in the family, and had the same origins, but neither Marx nor Engels acknowledged women as a social force.<sup>19</sup> The Marxist analysis ended where it began with the recognition that women as a group were disadvantaged, be they bourgeois or proletarian. Both men failed to draw what seemed to be logical conclusions from their own premises. Since women could not hope to improve their condition until after the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 511.

<sup>19</sup> Beatrice Webb claims that Marx, at the First International, made the statement that the working class could not be free until women were freed. It seems she was mistaken. The minutes of the General Council include no such statement by any Council member, in fact, no statement was made that even broadly hinted at such an idea. See: Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, Soviet Communism: A New Civilization? (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1935), ii, 813. The quote is actually from Lenin, XXX, 372.



proletarian revolution and the establishment of a socialist society, and since they were admittedly in a worse position than the male half of society, women had the most to gain from the revolution. Would they not likely be its most ardent supporters?

Marx never discussed the question of a role for women in the revolution. He wrote to Dr. Kugelmann:

Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great changes are impossible without the feminine ferment.<sup>20</sup>

But it would not be correct to assume he meant women were an essential leaven in society since nowhere else in his writings does he describe women as a political or social force. He probably meant that change in society brought change for women too. Engels was more direct, he said simply that women should not even attempt to free themselves until after the revolution. In Marxist theory woman plays the role of a bystander. She was not a partner in the revolution.

The call of the Communist Manifesto for all workers to unite might seem to belie the above interpretation. One might assume that when Marx and Engels called upon the workers, they meant all workers, male and female, but evidence to the contrary exists in the Minutes of the London meetings of the First International. On April 15th, 1865, the meeting of the General Council decided to pass a motion stating clearly that women were eligible for membership in the First International. The fact that such a motion had to be made indicates that to the leaders and membership the word 'proletariat' did not automatically

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<sup>20</sup>Marx, Letters to Dr. Kugelmann, p. 83.



include women.<sup>21</sup>

There is further evidence that Marx did not consider women as a potential revolutionary force. Although he was intensely interested in the Paris Commune and ascribed to it considerable historical significances, he failed to acknowledge the existence of "L'Union des femmes pour la defense de soins aux blesses." This group of women declared themselves for the Commune: "A victory in the present struggle. . . has. . . the same importance for women citizens as for men. . . ."<sup>22</sup> Marx and Engels also ignored other earlier concrete manifestations of female political activity. A women's club in France, called "Women's Suffrage," put forward a candidate for the Legislative Assembly in 1848,<sup>23</sup> and in England women were attempting to organize themselves into trade unions as early as 1834.<sup>24</sup> Marx and Engels cannot have been ignorant of the developing political consciousness of women. As Marxists they may have considered these events and movements inconsequential because real change in the position of women could come only after the victory of socialism. They pinned their hopes for revolution on the development and growth of the proletariat yet they ignored the female part of the proletariat. Their analysis of the process of social

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<sup>21</sup>The General Council of the First International 1864-1866: The London Conference 1856: Minutes, Vol. I (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), p. 82.

<sup>22</sup>Eugene W. Schulkind, "The Activity of Popular Organizations During the Paris Commune of 1871," French Historical Studies, I. (December, 1960), 401.

<sup>23</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 150.

<sup>24</sup>Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), p. 121.





change and revolution left out, in effect, half of society.

Although they were probably not aware of it, Marx and Engels were assuming female inferiority when they assigned the political role to the male proletariat alone. There is no evidence that they believed that women would ever become man's complete equal. There is, however, evidence that Marx and Engels believed in an essential and irrevocable psychological difference between the sexes which precluded equal roles in society for men and women. Marx, for example, refers to "natural differences of age and sex."<sup>25</sup> And he makes the same assumption when he cites with horror that little girls employed in factories often grow up to be "rough foul-mouthed boys" (see above, p. 37). Apparently boys will be boys but girls must be different. The fact that Marx and Engels assume a basic difference between the sexes is an important aspect of their ideas and seems the most likely explanation of why they never ascribed a political role to women. To the working men the message of Marxism was organize, become strong, and triumph over capitalism; to the women the message of Marxism was have patience and wait for the revolution.

Lenin accepted Marx and Engels' economic and historical explanation for the unequal position of women in the family but he drew new conclusions from their premises. To him the need for female emancipation was essentially manifested in the lack of participation by women in administrative positions, in the professions and in public life generally. He accepted, as had Marx and Engels, the basic thesis of

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<sup>25</sup>Marx, Capital, p. 459. See also: Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, in Selected Works, p. 334.



Fourier that the status of women was an indicator of social progress:

The status of women makes clear in the most striking fashion the difference between bourgeois and socialist democracy. . . .<sup>26</sup>

But Lenin went further to state that in a socialist democracy women must be encouraged to participate as full and equal partners. This approach took Lenin well beyond nineteenth century Marxism. He had a very political and public definition of emancipation. To Lenin emancipation meant female participation in all facets of public life:

Unless women are brought to take an independent part not only in political life generally, but also in daily and universal public service, it is no use talking about full and stable democracy, let alone socialism.<sup>27</sup>

Lenin's statement is clear and emphatic, and the importance he gave to this idea is demonstrated by his many references to it.<sup>28</sup>

A further point of difference was that, unlike Marx and Engels, Lenin was not prepared to wait for a future utopia for female emancipation. Even while he was still a revolutionary in exile he called for women to take part in the revolutionary uprising in Russia. In fact Lenin had such faith in the revolutionary potential of women that he claimed they could lead the revolution as well:

Not a single class in history has achieved power without producing its political leaders, its prominent representatives

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<sup>26</sup> Lenin, XXX, 120.

<sup>27</sup> Lenin, XXIV, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Lenin, XXVIII, 182; XXIX, 428-9; XXX, 120-1; XLII, 43. Krupskaya points out that between 1916 and 1917 Lenin wrote eight articles on the subject of women. N.K. Krupskaya, Zavety Lenina, o raskreposhchenii zhenshchiny: sbornik statei ("Lenin's Legacy on the Emancipation of Women"), (Moscow: Partinoe Izdatelstvo, 1933), p. 56.



able to organize a movement and lead it. And the Russian working class has already shown that it can produce such men and women.<sup>29</sup>

Lenin recognized women as part of the proletariat. Where Marx had ignored the women's organization in the Paris Commune, Lenin made very pointed reference to its existence and drew tactical inferences from it in his article "The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution" written in 1917.

Women. . . fought in the Paris Commune side by side with the men. . . . It will be no different in the coming battles for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Proletarian women will not look on passively as poorly armed or unarmed workers are shot down by the well-armed forces of the bourgeoisie. They take to arms. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Marx had said only that "feminine ferment" accompanied social change, Lenin claimed that female action would make social change.

Lenin also integrated the idea of female emancipation into his total body of social thought. Female emancipation was an essential part of his view of socialism, and he criticized those who were satisfied with a legalistic definition of female equality. Lenin said:

Laws alone, of course, are not enough, and we are by no means content with mere decrees.<sup>31</sup>

Lenin saw women subject to inequalities which could not be legislated out of existence. Equality could not be proclaimed. Women suffered from special disadvantages and they would need special advantages in

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<sup>29</sup>Lenin, IV, 370.

<sup>30</sup>Lenin, XXXII, 82.

<sup>31</sup>Lenin, XXX, 43. On this same theme see Lenin, XXX, 371; and XXIX, 429.





order to reach a position of equality. In this respect Lenin's theories concerning women were part of his general theories on the significance of "freedom" and "equality":

Instead of freedom for all, instead of equality for all let there be struggle against the oppressors and exploiters, let the opportunity to oppress and exploit be abolished. This is our slogan!<sup>32</sup>

Lenin believed that women were doubly oppressed. As he had said earlier in 1902, in What is to be Done?:

Oppression affects the most diverse classes of society. . . it manifests itself in the most varied spheres of life and activity--vocational, civic, personal, family. . . .<sup>33</sup>

Legal equality was only a necessary first step, women also needed work outside the home which would give them the economic independence necessary in order to achieve "real" emancipation. In contrast to Engels' position, Lenin insisted that women must join the proletariat and by participating in the building of socialism, emancipate themselves. Lenin shared Marx and Engels' realization that working outside the home presented difficulties to women:

Owing to her work in the house, the woman is still in a difficult position. To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialized and for women to participate in common productive labour. Then women will occupy the same position as men.<sup>34</sup>

He obviously did not share Marx and Engels' antipathy toward women's employment in factories, perhaps because he had not their first hand knowledge of the horrors of factory life, or most likely because he saw

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<sup>32</sup>Lenin, XXX, 408.

<sup>33</sup>Lenin, V, 400.

<sup>34</sup>Lenin, XXX, 43.



industrialization as the first necessary step forward for Russia.

Lenin probably made his views on this question well known to counteract the voices of those who for humanitarian or anti-modernist motives would have chosen to return the large female proletariat to their homes.

In pre-Revolutionary Russia, both the labor requirements of industry and the economic needs of the women had brought female labor to the factories. Women formed a large part of the proletariat in Russia from the 1890's on, and this trend was accelerated by the First World War. Lenin did not view female employment in industry as a social problem, he claimed that women should look upon factory employment as a step forward for them:

We explain that . . . the employment of women in industry. . . is progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism.<sup>35</sup>

Lenin never questioned that women must be emancipated, and he never questioned that a vital means to this end was their employment in industry.

But more than legal equality and employment outside the home was needed to create female emancipation. Women's difficult position in filling the double roles of worker and homemaker must be ameliorated. Agreeing with Engels that "private housekeeping" must become a "social industry," Lenin said:

The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather

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<sup>35</sup>Lenin, XXIII, 81.



when its wholesale transformation into a large-scale socialist economy begins.<sup>36</sup>

If women are to have a life outside the home, the daily housework and care of children must be taken off their shoulders. They cannot devote themselves to social and political life with the same enthusiasm as men if they must spend their time after the work-day is over preparing food, washing clothes, mending and ironing. They cannot participate in the economy, or in the public life of the country, unless there are agencies to assist her in her role as housekeeper and mother. Lenin pointed out the need for institutions which "really emancipate women," such as public dining rooms, creches, nurseries and kindergartens.<sup>37</sup>

As a final step in female emancipation Lenin demanded that women assume the responsibility of public office. As he said in 1920:

We want the working woman to be the equal of the working man not only before the law but in actual fact. For this working women must take an increasing part in the administration of the state.<sup>38</sup>

Lenin believed that women would make capable administrators:

There is no doubt that we have far more organizing talent among the working and peasant women than we are aware of, that we have far more people than we know of who can organize practical work, etc. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Lenin's ideal was that women should share in the social and political responsibilities of government. He was rejecting the traditional role of women as a homemaker whose complete aim in life was to care for her family and be a helpmate to her husband. Lenin believed that women

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<sup>36</sup>Lenin, XXIX, 429.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 429-430.

<sup>38</sup>Lenin, XXX, 371.

<sup>39</sup>Lenin, XXIX, 430. See also Lenin, XXIII, 328-9.



had a responsibility to society as a whole, and they should recognize this new broader sphere of action. Any differences in organizing capabilities between men and women were more apparent than real and were the result of women's lack of experience. The situation was thus not a 'natural' one but a result of circumstance, circumstance which could be changed:

By taking part in administration, women will learn quickly and catch up with the men.<sup>40</sup>

In Lenin's mind there did not exist any basic difference between men and women and he encouraged women to enter public life. While the state must take a supportive role and provide the facilities for child care, build public dining rooms and laundries, it could not emancipate women, they had to emancipate themselves.

Lenin applied, to the case of female emancipation, his basic ideas of mass emancipation already formulated in 1899:

Surely it cannot be imagined that any sort of study circles or books, etc., can politically educate the masses of workers if they are kept away from political activity and political struggle. Surely Russian Social Democracy does not have to go back to the viewpoint of the serf-owners who declared that it was first necessary to educate the peasants and then to emancipate them, or to the viewpoint of these ink-slingers who grovel before the government and say that people must first be educated and then granted political rights.<sup>41</sup>

These lines are full of Lenin's impatience with reformers who advocated human emancipation but were always for the 'right time' for action. To Lenin the time was now and the action that really counted was the action

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<sup>40</sup>Lenin, XXX, 371.

<sup>41</sup>Lenin, IV, 288.





of the people in need of emancipation. Revolutionary action was more than a blow struck against the oppressors, it was the necessary means to a new political and social consciousness for the masses. Speaking of the revolution of 1905, Lenin said:

The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will.<sup>42</sup>

The same idea he applied later to the emancipation of women:

We say that the emancipation of the workers must be effected by the workers themselves, and in exactly the same way the emancipation of the working women is a matter for the working women themselves.<sup>43</sup>

It was the activities of the women that could emancipate them. But Lenin did not have in mind just any activity, for he was aware that the potential power of women could be turned against the Party and the new Soviet State. As he told Clara Zetkin in 1920:

If the women are not with us the counter-revolutionaries may succeed in setting them against us. We must always bear this in mind.<sup>44</sup>

He was definite in maintaining that female emancipation should take place and that it should take place under the guidance of the Party:

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<sup>42</sup>Lenin, XXIII, 241. Compare to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Communist Manifesto, with an Introduction by A.J.P. Taylor (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 90. See also Marx and Engels, Collected Works, p. 27.

<sup>43</sup>Lenin, XXX, 44.

<sup>44</sup>Klara Zetkin, My Recollections of Lenin, with a Foreword by N.K. Krupskaya (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 79.



The Party must have its organs: working groups, commissions committees, sections or whatever else they will be called. Their special tasks will be: to rouse the masses of the women, bring them into contact with the Party and keep them under its influence.<sup>45</sup>

Lenin saw no contradiction in stating that women should be emancipated, and that they should be under the influence of the Party, for as he had said many times it was only under the conditions of socialism that women would have the opportunity to become equal partners in the public life of the country. He was aware that even in the Party itself women were not represented in equal numbers and he charged that the Party must work to correct this imbalance.<sup>46</sup> Lenin believed that women's participation in the public life of the new Soviet State was necessary for two reasons: first, from a moral or ethical point of view the state could not claim to be democratic or socialist if the women did not take an active part in public life;<sup>47</sup> second, from a practical point of view the new state would not succeed without the help of the women.<sup>48</sup>

Nadezhda Krupskaya agreed with Lenin on the political significance of women's emancipation. Her approach, however, displays a greater concern with the amelioration and enrichment of women's daily lives. In conversation with John Dewey, Krupskaya described the ideal of Soviet society toward which she worked:

The purpose of the regime is. . .to enable every human being to obtain personal cultivation. The economic and political revo-

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>47</sup>Lenin, XXIV, 70.

<sup>48</sup>Lenin, XXX, 46, 299.



lution that had taken place was not the end; it was the means and basis of a cultural development still to be realized. It was a necessary means, because without economic freedom and equality, the full development of the possibilities of all individuals could not be achieved. But the economic change was for the sake of enabling every human being to share to the full in all the things that give value to human life.<sup>49</sup>

Krupskaya was very concerned with the quality of human life and that it be experienced in a way that was satisfying and meaningful to the individual. She studied social problems through the pedagogical, psychological, and sociological literature of the day. An intellectual in her own right, Krupskaya formulated her ideas after reading: Moll, Ferster, Weber, Cousine, Pestalozzi, and the publications of American educators.<sup>50</sup> Following the trend of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries she stressed the importance of early childhood learning in the formation of the individual.<sup>51</sup> She believed human behavior was learned and that a sense of personal dignity came from being treated with respect. Her understanding of society and social problems had a psychological bent:

It is necessary to value sufficiently the educational significance in the feeling of the consciousness of the child, that he is a necessary member of society, that what he does is of general use. This develops both self-esteem and a serious attitude to the business at hand and to himself; this insures against self-doubt, spiritual emptiness and discontent.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>John Dewey, Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico--China--Turkey (New York: New Republic Inc., 1929), p. 112.

<sup>50</sup>N.K. Krupskaya, Pedagogicheskie sochineniia v desiati tomakh, VII (Moscow: Izdatelstvo akademii pedagogicheskikh nauk, 1959), 343. Hereafter this multivolume work is referred to as Krupskaya, Sochineniia.

<sup>51</sup>Krupskaya, Soviet Woman, p.27.

<sup>52</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, I, 114.





Her emphasis on childhood learning and early experience in the formulation of human personality gave an intellectual foundation to her belief that there were no irrevocable differences in psychology or intellect between men and women. Any apparent differences were learned, not innate.<sup>53</sup> Her belief was also buttressed by the tenets of the Russian intelligentsia; they never questioned women's equality with men.

From the beginning of her involvement in the Emancipation of Labor Group, she paid considerable attention to the question of the emancipation of women and though she theorized that the formative influences of childhood were the prime determinants of social attitudes, she saw the need for a plan of action that would prove effective in changing the attitudes of mature women. Education might be the way to mould the young girls of today into the emancipated women of the future, but Krupskaya faced the problem of changing the attitudes of women who had already accepted a subordinate role in public life.

In 1899 she wrote the pamphlet "Zhenshchina-rabotnitsa", or "Woman Worker", in which she maintained that economic independence was the key to female emancipation.<sup>54</sup> She explained that through joining the proletariat and gaining economic freedom, women would reach political awareness and a psychological freedom in their daily lives. They would become aware that their interests as women were the same as the interests of the proletariat as a class. Krupskaya described how this identification of interests would take place for the female proletarian:

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 87-90.



Her interests are the same as the interests of her worker-husband, she begins to understand that her freedom is tied to the freedom of the working class. She sees that there is no other route but the struggle for the working class.<sup>55</sup>

She believed, like Engels, that the initial cause of female dependence was the economic dependence of women upon fathers and husbands, and that if their economic dependence ended, women could throw off their subservient role and, like the male proletariat, become aware of politics. At this point, very early in her writing and political career, Krupskaya implies that the political, social and psychological freedom, which she seeks for women, will follow as a natural consequence of their economic independence. She goes on to describe how wives will cease being their husband's slaves and act as an "equal member of the family."<sup>56</sup>

In 1899, Krupskaya believed that emancipation would be a spontaneous result of economic independence. Later, during the Revolution and the years following, Krupskaya placed more emphasis on the role of the Party in mobilizing and guiding the masses of Russian women for emancipation. She maintained a close involvement with the Zhenotdel, or Women's Department, which was established in 1919 after the Revolution, and in 1924 when a movement was afoot to abolish the department, Krupskaya supported the Zhenotdel. She believed that special work among women was more necessary than ever under the conditions of NEP.

Krupskaya continued to push for the building of those institutions which could help women to free themselves. She always agreed with Lenin

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 87.



that women needed special help. She believed they needed freedom from domestic chores before they could take part in the political life of the country. In 1924 she used strong language to make her point:

Woman must be freed from domestic slavery in order to become more educated, cultured, and conscious; in order that she can be involved in social activities, in the administration of the government, in order to free women from centuries of slavery.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, Krupskaya felt that women had needs beyond the concrete ones of creches and dining halls: they needed education and culture. She pleaded for more educational work aimed specifically at women. In 1928 she again showed by her forceful words that the issue was still important to her:

We lost sight of the fact that involvement of the mass in socialist economic construction demands a great raising of the cultural level of the mass. Now from the practical workers, carried away by economic construction, it is not a rarity to hear such a conversation: "Most important is economics, this is the base. Culture, improvement of living conditions--this comes of itself." . . .if the base is important, then this still does not mean that it is everything, that it is above the raising of the culture of the mass.<sup>58</sup>

Krupskaya could not accept the existing trend to put economics above all other forms of development and she was now going beyond Lenin. She was concerned because the lives of the masses in general and of women in particular were still far from her ideal. She had moved far from her earlier position that economic independence would of itself lead to the personal and social emancipation of women, and she now maintained that

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<sup>57</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, VI, 80. See also her article "O byte rabotnits", ("On Women's Daily Life"), in Sochineniia, VI, 88-91.

<sup>58</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, VII, 445-6.





women would not become free until they were educated to accept their new freedom. Her book, Soviet Woman, was an attempt in 1937 to remind the Party and Government that the issue of the emancipation of women could not assume to be now closed and must not be forgotten. Between 1924 and 1937 her many articles and speeches stressed the accomplishments of women and the continued importance of work among women. As she said in one of her articles:

A connection exists between women's emancipation and the development and strengthening of Soviet power, with the general success of the building of socialism.<sup>59</sup>

While it is the theory of women's emancipation as developed by Lenin and Krupskaya that is of key importance in the Russian Communist Party work among women, in the West it has been assumed that the key role was played by Alexandra Kollontai. Because her works were translated and published abroad, because she was involved in the Workers Opposition, and because foreign journalists at the time of the Revolution found her an accessible and colorful character for interviews, she gained both fame and notoriety in the West. Her most quoted pamphlets, The New Morality and the Working Classes and Communism and the Family, however, are intended for a mass audience and make no contribution to the theory of women's emancipation.

The theory behind the work of the Communist Party among women was the product of Lenin and Krupskaya. While Marx and Engels had laid a foundation, the foundation was almost unrecognizable after Lenin and Krupskaya had built upon it. The prime contribution was Lenin's. He

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<sup>59</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, VI, 83.





gave women's emancipation a great significance in his theory of social revolution. Lenin made women's emancipation a question that was indissolubly linked with the building of the new socialist society.



## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION IN THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike maintained that the interests of women were identical with the interests of the working class, and from this they concluded that the Party should not have separate organizations for women. However, the backwardness and the special conditions of the female proletariat in pre-Revolutionary Russia forced them to concede that special work had to be done among women. This need for a special appeal to women had already been recognized by Lenin when he published Krupskaya's article "Zhenshchina-rabotnitsa" in Iskra in 1901,<sup>1</sup> but it was the rise of the feminist movement in Russia that forced practical decisions on the question of work among women.

The Bolsheviks were first spurred to action by the feminists in 1905. The Russian feminists began taking political action toward securing equal political rights, and they prepared a petition to this effect which was accepted by the short-lived First Duma. The Bolsheviks were disturbed when the feminists gained support from the female proletariat in the form of signatures for the petition. The Party was afraid that feminists might gain mass support among women. The feminists continued their efforts, and during 1906-1907 they began trying to organize the women workers into separate women's unions. This development further alarmed both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks who saw this as a threat to the unity of the working class. As a result, the two

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<sup>1</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 229.



parties co-operated in an anti-feminist campaign. Under various guises they formed women's clubs and held meetings in order to give 'correct' ideological leadership to the discontent of the working women.<sup>2</sup> They attempted to persuade women that true female equality could only come with the proletarian revolution, and that the 'bourgeois' demands of the feminists were only half-way measures.

During the anti-feminist campaign in 1907 the Bolsheviks set up the first women's club with the specific purpose of preparing women for political work in the trade unions and in the Party. The club was soon closed down by the authorities, but Bolshevik and Menshevik propagandists continued to reach women through the general meetings which were held to elect representatives to the All-Russian Feminist Congress of 1908. The intensive effort of the two Social Democratic parties showed some results. On the occasion of the Feminist Congress, representatives of the women workers who were associated with the Social Democratic Parties voiced their own more radical demands, had their own speakers on what they considered vital issues and put forth their own resolutions. This bloc tactic enabled them to maintain their radical position and the Social Democrats were able to outmaneuver the feminist bid for mass support. The efforts of the Bolsheviks in the anti-feminist campaign constituted their first organized work done exclusively with women.<sup>3</sup> The Bolsheviks did not make any further organizational moves aimed specifically at women until 1914 and again it was developments

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<sup>2</sup>The study circle was a method used by the revolutionaries since the 1890's. See Richard Pipes, Social Democracy and the St. Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885-1897 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 227-8, 231.





workers during the War could not fail to impress any party which spoke in the name of the proletariat and saw the proletariat as the prime revolutionary force.<sup>8</sup> Now that women were playing a greater role in industry it would seem logical that propaganda and organizational work among women should play an important role in the activities of the Bolshevik Party. But, despite the emphasis that Lenin and Krupskaya placed on the role of women in the revolution, the Party in Russia was unable or unwilling to carry out such work in practice.

It was not until 1914 that organized work among women was taken up again by Party members within Russia and abroad. In 1914 an illegal Party meeting of the Party organization of the Central Industrial Oblast decided to give special attention to work among women workers. Also in 1914, Lenin and Krupskaya tried to set up a legal workers publication Rabotnitsa or Woman Worker, aimed specifically at women. The journal was published in Russia with a board of editors partly abroad and partly in Russia. Lenin probably visualized Rabotnitsa as a Party organ around which to organize women. It could accomplish this by formulating for women workers their special needs and demands as women. Lenin had earlier, in 1901, formulated his idea of what a newspaper should do:

The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lenin no longer based his hopes for revolution exclusively on the proletariat. Since 1905 he recognized the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and called for an alliance of workers and peasants. See Schapiro, pp. 78-9.

<sup>9</sup> Lenin, V, 22.



The attempt to organize women failed. The police still controlled the legal press and when two out of seven issues of Rabotnitsa were confiscated the Party closed the journal down. Illegal agitation was still conducted whenever possible among all members of the proletariat, but mass work among women was not yet possible.

Meanwhile the War made the condition of the female proletariat intolerable. The labor scene was marked by constant strikes and lock-outs. The cost of living in the cities increased three times as rapidly as did wages, leaving workers on the verge of starvation. On the top of this the shortage of manpower in the countryside resulted in an actual food shortage. Some authorities in Petrograd were aware of the increasing hostility of the female proletariat.<sup>10</sup> The news from the front, of heavy casualties and repeated defeats for the poorly led and inadequately equipped army particularly alienated wives of the workers who had been sent to the front.<sup>11</sup> Fearing anti-government demonstrations, the authorities forbade the celebration of International Women's Day in 1917.<sup>12</sup> Needless to say, this did not improve the mood of the women.

The women began to protest the Government's ban and the workers of the Putilov metal works in Petrograd went out on strike in sympathy with them. Mass political demonstrations by the proletariat followed.

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<sup>10</sup>Fanning, p. 154.

<sup>11</sup>Krupskaya points out that many women who took part in the Revolution in Petrograd were the wives of workers who had been sent to the front. See Soviet Woman, pp. 9-10.

<sup>12</sup>N. Nikolaeva who worked among the women of Moscow, states that the Moscow Bolshevik Committee had urged the workers to mark International Women's Day by a political strike. Gudkova, p. 60.



within Russia that directly prompted their action.

In Russia the female proletariat was gaining in economic and political importance. The statistics of 1912 showed that women already constituted 30 per cent of the labor force in St. Petersburg and 44 per cent in the Moscow region. The female proletariat totaled 667,307 women,<sup>4</sup> and its numbers were constantly increasing. The first major strikes began around 1880 among the textile workers, nearly half of whom were women.<sup>5</sup> The importance of the female proletariat grew along with the growth of Russian industry. A well known feature of Russian industry from the 1890's on was the development of large scale enterprises, which both in their number and size were not duplicated anywhere in the West. In 1912 the most rapidly increasing group of enterprises were those employing 1,000 or more persons, and the larger the enterprise the larger the proportion of women employed in it. The First World War increased the demand for female labor and by 1915 it became clear that women were replacing men as industrial workers, since male unemployment was rising.<sup>6</sup>

The growth of the female proletariat had not been noted by Lenin in his study of capitalism in Russia,<sup>7</sup> but the rapid increase of women

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<sup>4</sup>Howard P. Kennard, ed., The Russian Year-Book for 1914 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1914), pp. 621-2.

<sup>5</sup>Lyashchenko, pp. 489, 546.

<sup>6</sup>Engels noted the increased use of female labor in England during the industrialization of the 1840's and Riazanova specifically points to it as one of the stages of industrial development. See Riazanova, pp. 64-5. The same theme is present in Kingsbury and Fairchild, p. 13. Also Lyashchenko is very clear on this point. See p. 773.

<sup>7</sup>Lenin, III.





The women were out in the streets bearing the slogans, "Bread", "Enough War", "Bring back our men from the front". They urged the soldiers, who were sent to quell the disturbances, to mutiny. In 1905 the soldiers had put down the Revolution but in 1917 the Government was unable to mobilize military support and it collapsed.

Probably in recognition of the role played by the women workers in the Revolution, the Bolsheviks on May 13, 1917 again brought out the journal Rabotnitsa. The board of editors included some well known women such as Krupskaya and Inessa Armand plus eight members of the female proletariat active in the revolutionary movement. "Rabotnitsa" put forward its aim in its first issue: to organize the general mass of women and to support the Bolsheviks. The journal and its board of editors functioned as a special unit of the Party to conduct work among women in Petrograd.<sup>13</sup> They organized women's meetings in factories and distributed leaflets. An anti-war meeting was attended by 10,000 persons, mostly the wives of soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

The work being done among women was mainly propagandist and a resolution taken by the Third Conference of Trade Unions in June of 1917 criticized the Bolshevik Central Committee's Organization Department for the limited nature of their approach. The trade unions criticized the usefulness of 'organizers' who merely passed out circulars restating resolutions already taken by previous Trade Union Conferences. They said:

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<sup>13</sup>Alexandra Kollontai was arrested for taking part in agitation work among women at this time.

<sup>14</sup>Gudkova, p. 19.





What is needed is to attract women to the general class movement by agitation and propaganda among women. The means necessary are special organs which will be responsible for conducting this agitation.<sup>15</sup>

The Trade Unionists may or may not have realized it but they were good Leninists. In his What is to be Done? published in 1901, Lenin had already stated his formula for revolution:

The principal thing, of course, is propaganda and agitation among all strata of the population.<sup>16</sup>

And this, of course, included women.

Though propaganda and agitation were closely linked, it is worthwhile noting that these words were not mere jargon and that they gained their meaning in a historical context. As Richard Pipes points out, in his study of Social Democratic tactics during the strikes of 1885-1897, propaganda in those pre-Revolutionary years meant offering education and information, while agitation meant the stimulation of strikes.<sup>17</sup> These historical usages give some clue to the use of these terms for the Revolutionary period. For Lenin and the trade union spokesmen, propaganda work meant the giving of information and a political indoctrination, while agitation meant stirring women up to the point of action. Propaganda produced gradual change; agitation produced concrete and immediate change.

Gradually, within the Party, organizations for work among women

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<sup>15</sup>Riazanova, p. 292. She quotes a statement by the Third Conference of Trade Unions, June, 1917.

<sup>16</sup>Lenin, V, 425.

<sup>17</sup>Pipes, pp. 120-1.



began to form. The Moscow Oblast Committee of the Bolshevik Party in August of 1917 established a commission for work among women and on the fifteenth of October they held an all-Moscow meeting of 600 women. In the same month in Petrograd, a conference of women workers was convened under the direction of the Bolshevik Party: 500 women attended, representing 80,000 women workers of Petrograd and surrounding areas.<sup>18</sup> In September of 1917 the Party Secretary Sverdlov, probably at Lenin's prompting,<sup>19</sup> made the suggestion to the Central Committee of the Party, that a central department for work among women be set up under the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party.<sup>20</sup> However, no action was taken until the following year.

The overall plan for work among women was not drawn by the Party, it was the creation of the All-Russian Congress of Female Workers and Peasants held in November of 1918. In the fall of 1918 a commission for work among women was established under the Central Committee of the Party. Its members were Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollontai, and, on an unofficial basis, Krupsakaya.<sup>21</sup> It also included fifteen delegates from Moscow and six from the provinces. The group was given five weeks in which to convene the All-Russian Congress of Female Workers and Peasants

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<sup>18</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 236.

<sup>19</sup>If the political assessment of Western authorities such as Louis Fischer and Leonard Schapiro is correct, then it is very likely that although the move was initiated by Sverdlov, the idea was Lenin's. Fischer calls Sverdlov a "prosaic organization man." Louis Fischer, The Life of Lenin (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 284. See Schapiro, pp. 172, 239.

<sup>20</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 239.

<sup>21</sup>Krupsakaya mentions also Sta[h]l and Kalinina and does not mention Kollontai. Sochineniia, VI, 83-4.



scheduled for November 16 through 21. When the Congress assembled, most of the 1,146 delegates came from industrial areas but one can only guess as to what proportion of these were proletarians. An agitation campaign had preceded the Congress and a valiant attempt was made to gather representatives from all sections of the female population. In order to encourage women workers to send delegates, agitators were sent to factories where no organization had existed previously. The agitation campaign had some success in the countryside since 10 per cent of the delegates were listed as poor peasants, and all guberniias were represented.<sup>22</sup>

The Congress was a milestone in the development of Party work among women, for it was this Congress that set up a plan of organization for the future.<sup>23</sup> Kollontai described the accomplishments of the All-Russian Congress of Women Workers and Peasants:

We, in the course of the past year, have worked out a plan of this work and at last in our All-Russian Congress we have proceeded to a definite organizational plan which then, in the circulars of the Central Committee, was approved and sent to party organizations.

The plan is thus. First of all under each Party committee, city, raion, or uezd, a commission is formed for agitation and propaganda among women workers. This does not mean, that in this commission there will be female workers alone. If there are not enough women then we will use men. Their task is defined --to conduct agitation and propaganda.<sup>24</sup>

The Congress also discussed specific practical problems of women. The agenda included questions such as education, the family, employment of

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<sup>22</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, VI, 81.

<sup>23</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, VI, 83-4.

<sup>24</sup>Vosmoi Sezd RKP (b): Protokoly, p. 297.





women and children, care for pregnant women and infants, the fight against prostitution, and the double role of women as workers and housewives.<sup>25</sup> Most of these problems were eventually approached through new legislation and government departments, but the contribution of the Congress in this area went beyond a general discussion of the problems. A plan put forth by Inessa Armand was adopted whereby women workers and peasants were to elect their own delegates to work with local governmental and administrative bodies. The institution of delegates, it was hoped, would solve women's problems in two ways. First, the opportunity to work on administrative organs would give women experience in administration, and in the long run increase their participation in public life. The delegates were to report back to the women who had elected them and discuss the work they had been doing. In this way women would not only be informed of the work of various organs, but hopefully would be encouraged to take a more active role in public life. Second, women had special needs for institutions to lighten their work of housekeeping and child care. By being present on administrative bodies they could make known the needs of the women who had sent them as delegates.<sup>26</sup> Thus it was hoped that women's involvement in administrative work would increase their political awareness and enable them to influence those organizations which could help them overcome their disabilities as women.

In December of 1918 the Central Committee of the Party acted on the plan of the Women's Congress and an order was sent out to the

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<sup>25</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 240.

<sup>26</sup>Vosmoi Sezd RKP (b): Protokoly, p. 297.



existing Party organs to create commissions for work among women at the local level. In March of 1919 at the Eighth Party Congress the need for further action on the question of work among women was brought up by Alexandra Kollontai. She described the plan of the Women's Congress of 1918 and she made an impassioned plea for the special needs of women. Her resolution on work among women was adopted by the Party:

Realizing the urgent necessity to increase our strength by attracting female workers and peasants to the struggle for Communism and the Soviet structure, the Eighth Congress of the Party makes all Party committees responsible for creating the existence of this work in practice.<sup>27</sup>

In September of 1919 the "Central Commission for Women Workers" was given a new title and an official status as the Zhenotdel, or Women's Department, set up directly under the Central Committee of the Party.

According to the report of the organizers of work among women who met in October of 1919, some work had already been done under the commissions previously set up, but only two guberniias could report that work was proceeding well. In some areas no work at all had been done, and no representatives were present from the areas recently under the control of Kolchak, and those where Denikin was still fighting, that is areas of Civil War. Generally it seems that the work was proceeding poorly since the term "just springing up" used to describe the state of work in Smolensk was a euphemism for "nothing done", as the local Party archives from Smolensk show. In light of this report, the Eighth All-Russian Conference of the Party meeting in December decided to send two instructors, responsible for work among women, to each guberniia where work was not yet established. From the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 453.



text of the Party Conference it appears that the problem was to find such instructors. A meeting of Moscow Communists provided a few as did the Central Committee of the Party.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the Central Committee issued a directive to all Party Committees at the guberniia and uezd levels ordering them to select one of their members to fill the post of chief of the newly created Zhenotdel.

The Central Committee was making demands which were almost impossible for many of the locals to meet. In Smolensk guberniia, on which there is detailed information, the Party locals were practically incapacitated through Party members being taken by the Army, and Party leadership being commandeered by the central authorities in Moscow. There were practically no officials available for Party work, even at the guberniia level. Famine, disease and war taxed the entire Party structure.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the inadequate personnel at the locals, the Party continues to demand the implementation of its plans. The Ninth Party Congress in March and April of 1920 pointed out that, in view of the significance of women workers and peasants in the economy, and the need for general social development, work among women was "one of the most urgent tasks of the moment and a necessary part of general Party work." The locals were told to choose their "best Party workers" for work among women.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kommunisticheskaia Partia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh sezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK (7th Ed.; Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1954), I, 225.

<sup>29</sup> Merle Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 38-9.

<sup>30</sup> Deviatyi Sezd RKP (b) mart-aprel 1920 goda: Protokoly (Moscow, 1960), pp. 430-1.





Party orders notwithstanding, the Zhenotdel was not able to organize in earnest until 1921 with the end of warfare, and the establishment of guidelines for the economy in the form of NEP. In November the Fourth Conference of the Chiefs of the Guberniia Zhenotdels was held in Moscow. The delegates faced three main tasks. First they had to defend the continued existence of their department against those who wished to see it disbanded, second they had to set up the organizational form of the department at the guberniia and uezd levels, and third they had to take a fresh look at their approach and methods of work in view of the abrupt change of emphasis in the plans for the economy.

Since the arguments used in favor of disbanding or merging the Zhenotdel are not given in the conference report, only conjecture is possible. But in view of the arguments presented by the Zhenotdel chiefs, it seems likely that their opponents took the position that the interests of women and the interests of the proletariat were the same and therefore there should be no special organizations for women. The Conference delegates began their defense by pointing out that the special needs and interests of women were still not taken care of. Next they pointed out that the Party, trade unions and soviets had shown themselves unable to work successfully among women. And finally their most telling point was that the Zhenotdel was essential to the Party since it constituted an apparatus "for influencing the non-Party mass."<sup>31</sup>

The Zhentodel chiefs were supported by the Eleventh All-Russian Conference of the Party in December of 1921. The Conference stated that

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<sup>31</sup>  
Smolensk Archives, WKP 428, pp. 1-2.





the Zhenotdel must perform the task of "involving the broad mass of women workers and peasants in the Party, soviet, cooperative and trade union structure," and called for an end to the "liquidationist attitude of some comrades to this area of work."<sup>32</sup> Additional support and direction came from a spate of directives to the guberniia departments from the Central Committee of the Party. Also notices from the Central Trade Union Congress, the Commissariat for Social Maintenance and the Chief Administration for the Kustar Industry testified that the question of the existence of the Zhenotdel had been decided and that central Party and non-Party bodies had begun to work with the Zhenotdel.<sup>33</sup>

The organizational form decided upon at the 1921 Zhenotdel Conference gave the Zhenotdel the status of an independent department at the guberniia and uezd levels. On paper at least, the guberniia department had a chief, a chief instructor, a chief of agitation work, an instructor in soviet work, a secretary of the department, a travelling instructor for every three uezds, and a clerical staff. The subordinate uezd department had a chief, an assistant to the chief, an instructor in soviet work, and one travelling instructor for every five volosts. The work of the department was to be "led" by the guberniia chief, and his task was a very complex one because the Zhenotdel was so closely integrated with other departments of the guberniia Party committee, with the Soviets, and with the trade unions.

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<sup>32</sup> Kommunisticheskaia Partia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh: sezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK. (7th ed.; Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1954), I, 598.

<sup>33</sup> Smolensk Archives, WKP 428, pp. 17-27.



All Party work had to be done in cooperation with the other departments. The Zhenotdel itself was organizationally interwoven with the other departments. For example, the chief instructor of the Zhenotdel was also a member of the Organization Department and all decisions which concerned the Zhenotdel and the Organization Department had to be approved by both departments. Similarly, all campaigns, conferences, or new methods of work had to be approved by the Agitation Department. In addition, the very agitators that the Zhenotdel used for such projects were the staff of the Agitation Department.<sup>34</sup> Thus in order to organize women's meetings, elections of women's delegates, or to conduct mass campaigns, the Zhenotdel was dependent upon other departments for workers and for approval of its plans.

In order to arrange practical experience for the women's delegates, the work of the Zhenotdel also had to be integrated with that of institutions outside of the Party. To do this a collegium was established at the guberniia and uezd levels which was responsible for "decisions of basic practical question." The trade unions and soviets, in which women were to do practical work, appointed organizers for women who were represented on the collegium along with the Zhenotdel and other Party departments.<sup>35</sup>

While the work of the Zhenotdel was difficult enough in theory, in practice it was even more difficult. In Smolensk guberniia, for example, work did not begin seriously until the spring of 1922. The

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



Party secretary and the Zhenotdel chief, in a report in 1924, blamed the earlier failures on the "liquidationist" attitude of the guberniia Party committee.<sup>36</sup> But as was discussed above, the Party in Smolensk suffered from an acute shortage of personnel in the early period, and work must have been nearly impossible. The guberniia Zhenotdel, for the period 1921 through 1924, functioned in the main with only two members. At the locals there was also a shortage of workers and much of the staff was unsatisfactory. In 1923 the guberniia chief and twelve instructors at the locals were discharged, and in November of 1924 the discharge of another uezd chief was imminent. In some uezds there was dissatisfaction with the organizational structure within the Party. In two uezds the Zhenotdel chief, along with the collegium of the department, decided that a chief was not necessary and the work of the Zhenotdel was passed on to the Agitation Department. Another uezd Party committee made the chief of the Zhenotdel also the chief of the Agitation Department.<sup>37</sup> The coordination of work with the non-Party bodies was also difficult. The collegium functioned continuously at the guberniia level but, since the trade unions did not appoint an organizer for work among women until January of 1924, work in the trade unions suffered.<sup>38</sup> At the uezds the collegia functioned only sporadically.<sup>39</sup>

The work of the Zhenotdel also took on a new direction from the

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., WKP 422, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 204.





time of the 1921 Zhenotdel Conference. The economy of the country was shattered and the introduction of NEP meant that private industry would control a large share of the economy as it expanded. It had been assumed that the revolution of the proletariat would bring state control of the economy including the distribution of funds. Instead, private ownership and control would increase under NEP. Marxists had always assumed that female emancipation could take place only in a socialist society that would build child care and housekeeping institutions to lighten the burdens of women. The Zhenotdel had to face the task of work among women without the provision of these institutions. The approach they had to take was essentially that of Lenin. The emancipation of women had now become a task for the women themselves. A task they must undertake with little or no material support from the state. With the "center of gravity" of work in the locals, the delegates' meetings, first introduced by Inessa Armand at the 1918 Women's Congress, took on a new significance.<sup>40</sup> The Zhenotdel had to organize women to enable them, as a group, to exert pressure on the trade unions and cooperative organizations to build dining halls and creches. The Zhenotdel had to make women so active in public life that their special demands would be met.

The question of women in the economy had also taken a new turn. In 1921 the problem was not getting women into the labor force, the problem was female unemployment. As the least skilled members of the proletariat, the women were the first to lose their jobs. The welfare

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., WKP 428, p. 7.



of the women required that jobs be found for them, and from the point of view of the Party and Government, the future growth of the economy required that the female proletariat remain concentrated until industry recovered. Both these considerations motivated the plans of the Zhenotdel to encourage women to join cooperatives, organize artels, and participate in the kustar or handicraft industry.

On the other hand, the hard facts were that there was little money, and the economy of Russia had almost ceased to function. Pressure on the trade unions and cooperatives could only work if the trade unions and cooperatives had the material resources to carry out the desired projects. There was also a tinge of unrealistic optimism in the hope that small producers' cooperatives or artels could be created when government and private industry were floundering. Nonetheless the work was attempted by the Zhenotdel.

The first goal, that of involving women in public affairs, was to be achieved through the organized meetings of the women's elected delegates. The aims of these meetings as spelled out by the 1921 Conference were:

. . .to unify around the Party, soviets and trade unions, the remaining strata of female workers and peasants; to draw them into the social, industrial, professional and Party interests; and to teach them to carry out specific practical work in the soviets, Party, and professional structure; and to make the workers and the peasants active members of the Party and workers in all social and governmental organs and institutions.<sup>41</sup>

The delegates were elected for four months in the cities and six months in the country. They were brought together at delegates' meetings

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 8.



where workers among women attempted to give them a political and social education. The programme of topics from Smolensk guberniia provides an example of the kind of questions taken up. Some were ideological, such as the trial of the SR's, participation of the workers in the revolutionary movement in the West and in Russia; some were on labor law, for example, collective agreements, and the protection of female labor. Government was also discussed under the topics of the constitution of Soviet Russia, tasks of the soviets, and elections in the soviets.<sup>42</sup>

Some delegates elected by women were chosen to work in the soviets, cooperatives, or trade unions as probationers. They were paid either by the factory where they were regularly employed, or by the trade union or cooperative in which they served as probationers. The factory workers who trained to be inspectors of labor were taken on as probationers for one year. They were paid a regular salary and the Department for the Protection of Labor decided at the end of the year whether or not the probationer was qualified. If she were not, she could train further, work in the union or join the Zhenotdel.<sup>43</sup> For work in the city soviets, factories had to give chosen delegates forty-five hours a month off with pay.<sup>44</sup> The cooperatives, at the guberniia and raion levels, had to pay and train several probationers. In this area, probation was for six months. The women were taught the laws concerning

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., WKP 422, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., WKP 428, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., WKP 422, pp. 45-6.





cooperatives, their basic operation, and given some practical experience in the offices of the cooperative. Then they were sent to work with women, teaching them about cooperatives and helping them to organize services such as creches through the cooperatives.<sup>45</sup> In each case the probationers were expected to take up the position they had trained for or to continue to work with women, and in this way to pass on the benefits of their new knowledge and training.

In Smolensk guberniia, because of the shortage of staff, work among women in the countryside was conducted only in selected volosts. The Zhenotdel began work in those volosts where the Party cells were the strongest. At the beginning of organized work in 1922 there were 35 such volosts chosen, and by 1923 the number had increased to 54. As a consequence, the number of delegates elected had increased from 1,000 to over 1,400. Probation was used to involve women in the work of the volost executive committee, the volost land commission, the committees of self-help, the village soviets, and the cooperatives. In the city of Smolensk there were nearly 1,000 delegates elected in 1923, and 223 of them were actively involved in social work, 150 of them in children's homes. Schools of political literacy and study circles were attended by nearly 300 women. From the delegates elected in the city of Smolensk, 40 had joined the party. In the period 1920 to 1923, the number of women candidates elected to positions in the soviets increased from 28 to 48 in the villages, and from 59 to 81 in the cities. The schools for political education were well attended by women. In Iartsevo,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., WKP 428, p. 22.





out of 325 students, 297 were women, and in the city of Smolensk out of 312 students, 223 were women.

The unemployment problem continued through 1924 in Smolensk guberniia. In January 1924 there were 5,139 women unemployed in the largely agricultural guberniia. The Zhenotdel attempted to give the women self employment but failed. Kitchen gardens, needlework artels and a community laundry were organized but they collapsed for lack of either materials or markets. In the city of Smolensk, a sewing and mending workshop for 50 women was functioning and an artel for selling buns had 10 members. Unskilled women had also been organized for snow removal. The Zhenotdel worked with the Department of Labor to determine the most needy cases for employment or social assistance. The trade unions and the guberniia Health Department opened a children's creche, but the children's sanitorium opened by the construction workers, for the children of the unemployed members of their union, had to close for lack of funds. Attempts by the Zhenotdel to organize domestic servants into unions met with some success and much bad feelings. Many servants lost their jobs because of union membership. Also some meetings were held with housewives but the emphasis was on getting them involved in already established meetings for male and female workers. And what must have been very discouraging to the Zhenotdel, attempts to organize the wives of Communists met with resistance from the husbands.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>The material above on the operation of the Smolensk Zhenotdel may be found in the Smolensk Archive, WKP 422, pp. 204-10.



It appears that the work of the Zhenotdel in Smolensk had some effect. Women became more involved in community or public activity. The changes, if any, that took place in their attitudes cannot be directly assessed from the available data. On the attitude of the various institutions involved, toward work among women, all that is available is a statement by the secretary of the Smolensk guberniia Party committee and the chief of the guberniia Zhenotdel, which reflects on the attitudes of some.

From the available information it appears that Smolensk Zhenotdel had only a limited success in the early years of its operation. The visible results were the increased participation of women in social work and in local government. The more subtle effects of the political education given delegates, such as changes in attitudes, cannot even be conjectured upon for this short period. Work was done mainly in the cities, and had not even begun in some areas of the countryside. Attempts to organize self-employment for women were generally not successful, nor could the Zhenotdel claim much success in the creation of child care or housekeeping institutions to lighten women's labor. In order to be fully effective, within the limited material resources of the guberniia, the Zhenotdel needed the unqualified support of non-Party institutions and the Party committees. The various central authorities gave clear cut directives supporting the work of the Zhenotdel, but the problem existed at the locals where the work was actually done. As the secretary of the guberniia Party committee reported in 1924, there was a "division of opinion in the Party, the trade unions, and the soviet agencies in their attitude to work among women." Apparently the



necessary support was not forthcoming.<sup>47</sup>

Statistics for the entire country in roughly the same period indicate a similar pattern of results for the network of the Zhenotdel. The role of women in the industrial and economic life of the country remained relatively unchanged from pre-revolutionary years.<sup>48</sup> There may even have been a slight drop in the representation of women among factory workers. Statistics for 1913 give the proportion of females in the proletariat at 33-1/3 per cent.<sup>49</sup> Figures for the 1920's are given in terms of union membership. The first available figures for industrial unions show that in 1926 women accounted for 27 per cent of the membership.<sup>50</sup> Possibly the spread of trade union organizations included smaller enterprises in which women were less well represented. Or, on the other hand, the decline may be a real one, reflecting the problem of female unemployment. Within industry there were some changes. For example, women in 1913 had comprised only 4.8 per cent of the metal workers, one of the most highly paid groups,<sup>51</sup> while in 1926 they were 11.6 per cent of the membership.<sup>52</sup> But taken as a whole, women

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>48</sup>G.N. Serebrennikov, The Position of Women in the USSR. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1937), p. 62.

<sup>49</sup>J.G. Gliksman, "The Russian Urban Worker: From Serf to Proletarian," in The Transformation of Russian Society: Aspects of Social Change Since 1961, ed. by Cyril E. Black (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 315.

<sup>50</sup>Kingsbury and Fairchild, p. 89. See Table 18.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 13. See Table 3.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 89. See Table 18.





in factories were still the less skilled workers; figures for 1927 show that the average monthly wage for men was 60 roubles, while women were paid only 42 roubles per month.<sup>53</sup>

More closely related to the work of the Zhenotdel, the proportion of women on factory committees in 1924 was only 13.4 per cent of the total, and in the area most stressed by the unions and the Zhenotdel, the committees for the protection of labor, women comprised 20.4 per cent of the members.<sup>54</sup>

The work of the Zhenotdel aimed at involving women in local government also produced some results, and as was already noted in Smolensk guberniia, better results were achieved in the cities than in the countryside. The statistics available are for 1926 rather than 1924, but are some reflection of work done in the period 1921 to 1924. Of the elected membership of the soviets in 1926, women accounted for 18.2 per cent in the cities, and 9.9 per cent in the villages.<sup>55</sup> Only 0.6 per cent of the chairmen of soviets were women, but they made a better showing in the All-Russian Congress of Soviets where 8 per cent of the delegates were women.<sup>56</sup> The country-wide figures indicate that women, though not represented in large numbers, were taking part in government from the highest to lowest levels.

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<sup>53</sup>Jessica Smith, Woman in Soviet Russia. (New York: Vanguard Press, 1938), p. 26.

<sup>54</sup>Kingsbury and Fairchild, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup>Krupskaya, Soviet Woman, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup>Volf Moiseevich Bronner, La lutte contre la prostitution en URSS (Rochester: VOKS and V. Bronner, 1926), p. 24.



The area of work for which the Zhenotdel was directly responsible showed concrete results. In 1923 there were 95,000 elected women's "delegates" involved by the Zhenotdel in work for the community. Again, since figures are not available for 1924, the figures for 1926 which show an increase to 620,000 delegates are of interest since they indicate a trend for the period and perhaps also some carry over effects from the work done up to 1924.<sup>57</sup>

The last statistics of interest concern Party membership. They are important since Party membership represents the highest degree of involvement in the social, economic, and political structure of the country. In 1922 they made up 7.8 per cent and in 1924 9.9 per cent of the total membership.<sup>58</sup> Even after the Party Congress directive of 1924 stated that more women were needed in the Party, especially in leadership posts,<sup>59</sup> and despite the second "Lenin enrollement" of 1925, which was aimed at increasing female membership,<sup>60</sup> women were still more weakly represented in the Party than was functional for a Party purporting to represent all groups of the population. The figures for January of 1927, although again for a period slightly later than the one under discussion, are valuable because a breakdown is given of female membership on Party committees from the guberniia down to the uezd level.

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<sup>57</sup>Krupskaya, Sochineniia, VI, 81-2.

<sup>58</sup>T.H. Rigby, Communist Party Membership in the U.S.S.R.: 1917-1967 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 361.

<sup>59</sup>Trinadtsatyi Sezd: RKP (b): Protokoly, p. 679.

<sup>60</sup>Rigby, n. 26, p. 139.



Total female membership had risen to 12.1 per cent but,<sup>61</sup> within the Party structure, women's representation on Party committees was in each case lower than overall membership. The largest proportion was on city committees, 10.5 per cent; next came uezd committees with 7.6 per cent; closely followed by guberniia committees at 7.2 per cent.<sup>62</sup> No figures are available on Party secretaries at any of these levels. All that can be concluded is that the percentage of women in the Party was increasing, and that proportionally women did not fare badly on Party committees in comparison with their total membership. But as even the Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia points out, in terms of the Party as a whole, the proportion of women in the Party was still "insignificant".<sup>63</sup>

The Zhenotdel had not reached its goal of involving large numbers of women in union administration, the government, the Party or in the community generally. But through their efforts women were involved in these areas in increasing numbers. Since the Zhenotdel could only function with cooperation from the Party and from administrative organs outside the Party, their role was a difficult one. There was disagreement in all sections of the society and government on the value and significance of their work. Despite the many drawbacks under which they operated, including shortages of personnel and the disastrous state of the economy, they were able to make a contribution because they offered women encouragement, information, and perhaps the prime factor,

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 361. See Table 31.

<sup>62</sup>Bolshaia, XXV, 245.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.



organization in their first steps toward a role within the structure of the Soviet State.





## CONCLUSION

Female emancipation played a large role in the tradition of the Russian intelligentsia. In Russian literature the emancipated woman had intellectual interests and a great concern for the social issues of the day. This was the ideal of the radical intelligentsia who rejected the traditional attitudes of society including the traditional role for women. As the split grew, between the intelligentsia and the rest of Russian society, the intelligentsia became a group apart which lived by its own ideals. In this society women were treated as equals. They shared in the intellectual discussions, in the demonstrations and in all forms of conspiratorial activity.

The female intelligentsia accepted the ideals of education and social commitment and with the 1880's, after Lavrov, they added still another goal, that of social usefulness. Here they met with frustration even greater than their male counterparts, for they found the universities and most professions closed to them. The issue of female emancipation was so important by the early 1900's that it was included in the party platform of most political parties.

At the same time the dissatisfaction of the female proletariat was also increasing. They made up one-third of the industrial proletariat and since the unions in Russia were organized on the principle of 'one enterprise--one union,' they could exert considerable influence. The female textile workers took part in many strikes, some of which resulted in confrontations with government troops. During the war female employment increased, and with the bad living conditions and poor



morale which accompanied the war, so did the discontent of the female proletariat. Their protests on International Women's Day were part of the events which precipitated the Russian Revolution.

Lenin incorporated women into his plans for revolution and social change. In doing so he diverged greatly from the ideas of Marx and Engels. While Marx and Engels advocated female emancipation, they treated it as an ideal for the future and advocated that the issue be let alone until a socialist economy could institutionalize housekeeping and child care and give women equal freedom with men. They left political action to the male proletariat. Lenin accepted the Marxist historical explanation for the subordinate position of women but with the Russian intelligentsia he believed in women's equality and revolutionary capabilities. As a practical politician he recognized the importance of the female proletariat and peasantry in the economy and in society. His contribution to political theory in this area was to include women as a political and social force, and his contribution to the cause of female emancipation in Russia, was to claim that it was a prerequisite to the success of the Revolution and the new Soviet State. By emancipation Lenin meant women should take on equal responsibilities in public life: in the economy, the administration, the government, and the Party.

The idea of female emancipation was institutionalized in the Party by the creation of a department for work among women, the Zhenotdel. It began as a department of the Central Committee and subordinate departments were established at the guberniia and uezd levels. Its task was to involve women in all aspects of public life and to focus



attention on the special needs and problems facing women. Because it existed primarily as an integrative rather than an independent department, its tasks were complicated by the willingness or unwillingness of other groups to give it support.

The Central Committee of the Party and other central authorities were giving the Zhenotdel full support by the end of 1921, but the problem could not be solved at the top. In order to function in their work, the Zhenotdel and its workers needed a great deal of support at the locals. In the case of the trade unions, women had to be organized from within the factories, and since this organization was the responsibility of the trade unions, the Zhenotdel could only work effectively through the trade unions. In the case of work among peasants and other women the help of the Agitation Department of the Party committee was necessary. The plans of the Zhenotdel for campaigns and conferences needed official approval from the Agitation Department, and the implementation of these plans required workers from the Agitation Department. Problems plagued the Zhenotdel because opinion in the Party and in non-Party institutions, especially at the local level, remained divided on the question of work among women.

The achievements of the Zhenotdel in the period from 1919 to 1924 were not great. Work in the countryside was generally weak and qualified workers difficult to find. Its greatest successes were first, with the delegates' meetings which gave women an important asset, organization, and led some women to take on political and social responsibilities in the community; and second in the work it did with the trade unions in placing women on the committees for Protection of Labor in the factories.





Despite the political education given the women's delegates, and the official encouragement of the Party as a whole, women did not join the Party in anywhere near the numbers required to make the Party representative of women as well as men. The Zhenotdel in Soviet Russia could count few concrete achievements, but the existence of a department devoted exclusively to women was official notice to the women of Russia that they were part of the total society and that their participation in that society was wanted.



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